

Collection #
M 1512
OM 0769

**INDIANA CIRCUSES
COLLECTION, CA. 1885-1990**

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 half-sized manuscript box, 1 oversized folder, 1 half-sized photograph box, 1 OVB folder, 1 printed item
COLLECTION DATES:	Circa 1885-1990
PROVENANCE:	Various
RESTRICTIONS:	None
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REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.
ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	SC3625, Great Wallace Shows Contract; SC3383, Jerry Mugivan Collection; P0842, Mary Edith Mugivan Postcards; P0533, Cole Bros. Circus Photographs; M1486, Ferol Meeker Circus Interview Transcripts
ACCESSION NUMBERS:	2023.0039; 2023.0036; 2023.0146; 2025.0068; 2025.0149
NOTES:	This is an artificial collection with future additions expected.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Peru Indiana livery stable owner Benjamin E. Wallace (1847-1921) established the Great Wallace Shows circus in 1883 with help from seasoned circus man James Anderson and popular singing clown Al. G. Fields. At that time, the show traveled overland by wagon, touring Kentucky and Virginia. By 1886 Wallace had put his circus on rails, and the show grew year by year. In 1891 he purchased from Miami civil chief Gabriel Godfroy one of the finest farms in the state on which to house the circus in the offseason. Then in late 1906 Wallace successfully purchased the equipment and title of famous German animal trainer Carl Hagenbeck's circus. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus out of Peru, Indiana became a major rival to the Ringling Brothers Circus from Baraboo, Wisconsin, also established in 1883. Hagenbeck-Wallace remained one of the largest and most popular circuses in the country for a further thirty years.

Wallace's Peru winter quarters near the confluence of the Wabash and Mississinewa Rivers had also grown year by year. After Wallace's passing in 1921, a trio of showmen, Jerry Mugivan (1873-1930), Bert Bowers (1874-1936), and Ed Ballard (1874-1936) acquired the property. Mugivan and Bowers had operated several circuses since 1904, including Howe's Great London (previously called the Great Van Amburg Circus), Robinson's Famous (previously called Sanger's Circus), and John Robinson's Circus. Mugivan was a native of Terre Haute, Indiana. Ballard, born near West Baden Indiana, had purchased Hagenbeck-Wallace from Wallace in 1914. The three pooled their resources and formed the American Circus Corporation (ACC) around 1918.

In addition to Hagenbeck-Wallace, John Robinson's, and Howe's Great London, the trio added titles to their holdings during the 1920s like Sells-Floto, Al G. Barnes, Gollmar Bros., and more. This growth required extensive additions to the Peru winter quarters, which were used in combination with other properties nationwide, including Ballard's farm in West Baden. By 1929, the trio's combined circus holdings dwarfed those of the big conglomerate Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus, by then quartered in Sarasota, Florida. That year, John Ringling took on heavy debt to buy out the American Circus Corporation, putting every major American circus in his hands. The stock market crashed shortly afterwards, and Ringling eventually defaulted on the loan. One by one, the old ACC circuses went bankrupt under Ringling control. Only the Ringling-Barnum show would survive the Great Depression.

Two experienced ACC managers, Zack Terrell and Jess Adkins, grew tired of working for Ringling. In 1935 they started a new independent circus called Cole Bros. The Ringling-controlled Peru quarters off-limits to them, they chose Rochester, Indiana as their home base. In 1938, they added a second show called Robbins Bros. A fire at the Rochester quarters that year forced the managers to close Robbins after one season and to look for other lodgings. Thereafter they quartered Cole Bros. in Louisville, Kentucky.

In 1958, a group of retired performers living in Peru began training local kids to do circus acts. The Peru Amateur Circus and the annual Circus City Festival were the eventual result, which continues to this day each July.

In 1987, the National Parks Service named the Peru winter quarters property a National Historic Landmark. Soon afterwards, a group of circus enthusiasts brought the International Circus Hall of Fame to the property and established a museum in one of the barns.

Sources:

Materials in the collection

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This artificial collection was created to centralize future circus-related acquisitions. It has been arranged into series according to circus titles.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Wallace & Co. / Great Wallace Shows

CONTENTS

Al. G. Fields circus songster, circa 1885

Personal letter from Fred [Wagner?] to wife on Great Wallace Shows stationery, [16 Sept. 1901?]

Pipe Club, Wallace Show [postcard cyanotype of seven men, some with pipes in mouths, with handwritten identifications], 1906

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 11

Box 1, Folder 1

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 1

Series 2: Hagenbeck-Wallace

CONTENTS

Sadie Conners [performer lays back on black horse which is posing on a pedestal], circa 1907

[Four views of Hagenbeck-Wallace on flooded lot, Bucyrus Ohio, 30 May 1908]

Dining Tent, Hagenbeck-Wallace [interior], n.d.

[Group of troupers pose next to train and a sign for Pando, Colorado, 1908 or 1909?]

First advance car and crew '09

[Camels and elephants in parade, with spectators standing and in buggies, Pittsfield, Illinois, 1909?]

[Percy Phillips stands on elephant's head in front of brick elephant barn at winter quarters, postmark 1909]

"No Local Option for John [Helliott?] and Bruno," [man and polar bear sitting at small table, the man holds up a toast], circa 1910

"[John Helliott?] Wrestling a Polar Bear" circa 1910

CONTAINER

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 10

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 2

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 8

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 9

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 9

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 9

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 9

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 3

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 3

The Carl Hagenbeck and Great Wallace Shows Combined Official Review and Magazine of Zoology, 1912	Box 1, Folder 2
[Man crouching on dead elephant at winter quarters after March 1913 flood]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 20
Jimmie Eviston's crew, advance car #1, 1914	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4
Hagenbeck-Wallace Shows, three of the pets [a woman wearing a large, feathered hat holds two lion cubs, circa 1914]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4
Race Riders [with handwritten identifications], circa 1914	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4
Four Horse Roman Racing Chariots [with handwritten identifications], circa 1914	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4
Hagenbeck-Wallace Shows [10 elephants laying down with horse tent in background]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4
Hagenbeck-Wallace Shows [white horse kneeling with white dog on its hindquarters attached to buggy driven by Louise DeMott (Mrs. Bob Stickney)]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4
Fred Ledgett, Sadie and Joe Leitchel, Burt Cole, Hagenbeck-Wallace, 1914	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4
[Clown Arthur Borella with dog and news butcher Eddie Martin, 1915]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 4
[Lee Sinclair holds two lions cubs while seated in atrium of West Baden Springs Hotel], circa 1916	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 11
Business letters on Hagenbeck-Wallace letterhead, R.M. Harvey to Edward S. Bronson, 1914	Box 1, Folder 3
Farewell menu, 1924	Box 1, Folder 4
Miss Anna DeMont, Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, 1926	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 12
Knecht, Klara E., <i>The Circus</i> , 1934	General Collection: GV 1821 .H3 K55

Series 3: John Robinson's Circus

CONTENTS

The Original Nelson Family [shows nine members of acrobatic family act, which was also previously with Great Wallace Shows and Hagenbeck-Wallace], circa 1917

[Two postcards showing performer Theol Nelson], circa 1921

[Midway, showing main entrance, balloon vendor, partial sideshow bannerline, and "Mysterious Zoma" pit show], circa 1918

[Bag punches Carrie and Ollie Keeley, "The Two Keeleys," wearing boxing gloves and facing each other], circa 1919

Business forms and tickets, 1921-1924, n.d.

Miss Ione Carl, John Robinson's Circus [a woman inside cage faces two roaring lions. She is dressed in costume and holds a long pole and chair in her left hand and a whip in her right], circa 1926

Gil Robinson, Jerry Mugivan, and Sam B. Dill on circus lot, 1927

Letter, Jerry Mugivan to "Gentlemen," 3 June 1927

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Photographs,
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Photographs,
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Box 1, Folder 5

OVB Photographs,
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Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 19

Box 1, Folder 12

Series 4: Great Van Amburg / Howe's Great London Circus

CONTENTS

Charles Johnson, bounding wire artist [two photographs, both mounted to cards. One a portrait and the other showing Johnson mid-somersault on the wire. Seemingly Johnson was with Van Amburg this season only], 1907

Letter on HGL letterhead, Jerry Mugivan to "Mr. W. Link, Agent," 3 May 1916

[Bandwagon with three arches pulled by two horses]

CONTAINER

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 15

Box 1, Folder 13

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 6

[Wagons on broken flatcar]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6
Bill Langer [clown with bounding rope act, out of makeup] with Howe Show	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6
[Three men and obelisk-shaped gravestone reading "James"]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6
[Group of men posing on the "runs," a ramp for unloading wagons from flatcar]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6
[Four men mugging for camera]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6
[Man standing upright on horseback]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6
[Clowns in "back yard" during performance]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6
[Two men, one in cowboy hat and furry chaps, the other a clown cop in blackface]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7
[Group of men pose in ankle-deep mud with manual stake-puller]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7
[Bactrian camel hitched to buggy]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7
[Elephant pushing three-arched bandwagon]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7
[Group of men stand around newborn camel and mother]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7
[One man and seven women pose with horse]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7
[Six riders on horseback pose next to bandwagon with drummers visible]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7
[Twelve men on mounts with matching costumes]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7
[Ten-horse team hitched to wagon with big top in background]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 7

Series 5: Sells-Floto Circus

CONTENTS

Business letter on Sells-Floto letterhead, Zack Terrell to Jerry Mugivan with handwritten response on verso, 1926

[Two women labeled “Mama & Lady” pose with a white horse labeled “Johnny.” Processor understands this photo was from a Hodgini Family album. The Hodginis were with several Indiana shows, including Sells-Floto in the 1920s], 1920s

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 6

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 16

Series 6: Miscellaneous

CONTENTS

“Gabe Godfroy, Chief of the Miamis” [written in ink on real photo postcard circa 1910, showing younger Gabriel Godfroy circa 1880s. Obituary clipping is adhered to verso]

Famous Robinson/Robinson’s Famous official program and song book, 1915

[View of Peru winterquarters showing large wagon shed which reads, “Winter Quarters of the Great Wallace Shows”]

[View showing a crowd of men at the sale of the Norris & Rowe circus at Wallace winter quarters], 1910

Benjamin E. Wallace portrait, circa 1920

Mrs. E.J. Weber poses on raised knee of an elephant, n.d.

American Circus Corporation color letterhead, circa 1929

Al G. Barnes Circus feed and lot contracts, n.d.

Robbins Bros. Circus with Hoot Gibson Magazine and Daily Review, 1938

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Photographs,
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Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 5

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 5

Photographs,
Box 1, Folder 18

Box 1, Folder 7

Box 1, Folder 8

Box 1, Folder 9

Letters, Tom Dunwoody and John Fugate to model
builder Howard Paul, 1990

Box 1, Folder 15

Series 7: Peru Amateur Circus

CONTENTS

Annual Festival Program, Sept. 1961

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Box 1, Folder 10