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## From the Editor...

In the January-February issue there was an article on the Two Hemispheres wagon. Unfortunately the author obtained his information from a publication he thought to be reliable that turned out otherwise.

Greg Parkinson of the Circus World Museum wrote to say that "over the years, many sources of information have falsely recorded the history of the Two Hemispheres Bandwagon. Even a postcard widely circulated by the Circus Hall of Fame stated things which were not accurate about this spectacular vehicle."

Parkinson went on to list the correct background of the wagon. Following is his report:

The wagon was not built in 1896, but rather 1902. It was ordered from Sebastian Wagon Co. on May 31, 1902 by James A. Bailey. The story about being built for Phineas T. Barnum is entirely false as he died on April 7, 1891. The theme of the wagon was decided upon by Bailey to commemorate Barnum & Bailey Circus's 1897-1902 tour of Europe.

Although the Two Hemispheres was pulled for a while by a 40-horse hitch, it never appeared in Europe. The pictures of the 40-horse hitch in European cities were taken during the 1897-1902 tour, and the

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wagon being pulled was the Five Graces (now at the Ringling Museum of the Circus).

Jumbo, the famous elephant purchased from the London Zoological Society, was killed by a freight train in 1885. Thus he could not possibly have pushed Two Hemispheres out of the mud.

Although it is true that Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey paraded in 1919 and 1920 following the combination, we have no evidence here at the Circus World Museum that Two Hemispheres was used in those parades. There is, on the other hand, photographic evidence of the Five Graces parading with the big show band which would have been under the direction of Merle Evans at that time.

Fred Pfening, Jr. of Columbus, Ohio, has recently presented the Circus World Museum with an unbelievable movie of the 1904 Barnum & Bailey Circus street parade which shows the Two Hemispheres being pulled by the 40-horse hitch in its first season after construction. After Jan., 1982 a copy of this film will be available to circus fans and historians to be shown at their meetings.

—cfa—

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# THE SEASON OF 1945 RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS

Old Atlanta lot draws the attention of then-young circus fan

by Richard J. Reynolds, III

**Editor's Note:** This article is written in conjunction with CFA Historian Joseph Bradbury's account of the 1945 edition of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in the Nov.-Dec. '81 and Jan.-Feb. '82 issues.

Since 1895, the Healey family, prominent Atlantans, had owned a large tract of land situated east of the downtown area on Highland Avenue, alongside Southern Railway's belt line. The site had been used in 1890 and 1891 by the Atlanta Car Co. to repair railroad equipment. That business failed and the Healeys, who had been stockholders, wound up with the land.

The years went by, and the property stood dormant. Eventually, its owners decided to clear off the last of the old car shop sheds and to make the premises available for traveling tent shows. That was done by 1924, and in November the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus became the first to use the lot which would become known as the Highland Avenue showgrounds. This was the place, beginning in 1937, that I contracted the fever of sawdust and spangles and became imbued

with the magic of the white tops.

With the railroad sidings right there, I thought the Highland Avenue lot must surely have been the best anywhere. Yet, when I posed that thesis to my father, he would always show partiality for the Atlanta circus grounds of his own childhood. They were called the "Jackson Street Showgrounds" and consisted of a vacant block bounded by Jackson, Irwin, Boulevard, and Old Wheat Streets.

Located in the same neighborhood as Highland Avenue, the Jackson Street lot was even closer to downtown Atlanta. While it is now the site of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center, the Jackson Street lot served as Atlanta's primary showgrounds from 1889 through 1918. My father would always remark that its simple, flat, square-block size was better for a circus layout than the complex, multi-level configuration of the Highland Avenue property.

To acquaint the reader with the geographical relationship of the Highland Avenue showgrounds to its surrounding streets and the other Atlanta locations mentioned in this story, I refer to the accompanying drawing by my son Michael Reynolds.

Though situated almost a mile further east than the Jackson Street grounds, the Highland Avenue lot was quite convenient to Atlantans, being served by two streetcar routes, the Highland Avenue line and the Irwin Street line. The former brought circus patrons from downtown across the Highland Avenue bridge over the Southern Railway sidings and deposited them right at the main entrance. The initial car had run over its tracks on Dec. 10, 1889, the year during which electric street railway service was first inaugurated in Atlanta.

The other streetcar service to the Highland Avenue showgrounds, the Irwin Street line, came through a private tunnel under the railroad at the rear of the lot, ran along the back side of the circus grounds, and ended at Lake and Elizabeth Streets. It had been in operation since 1893.

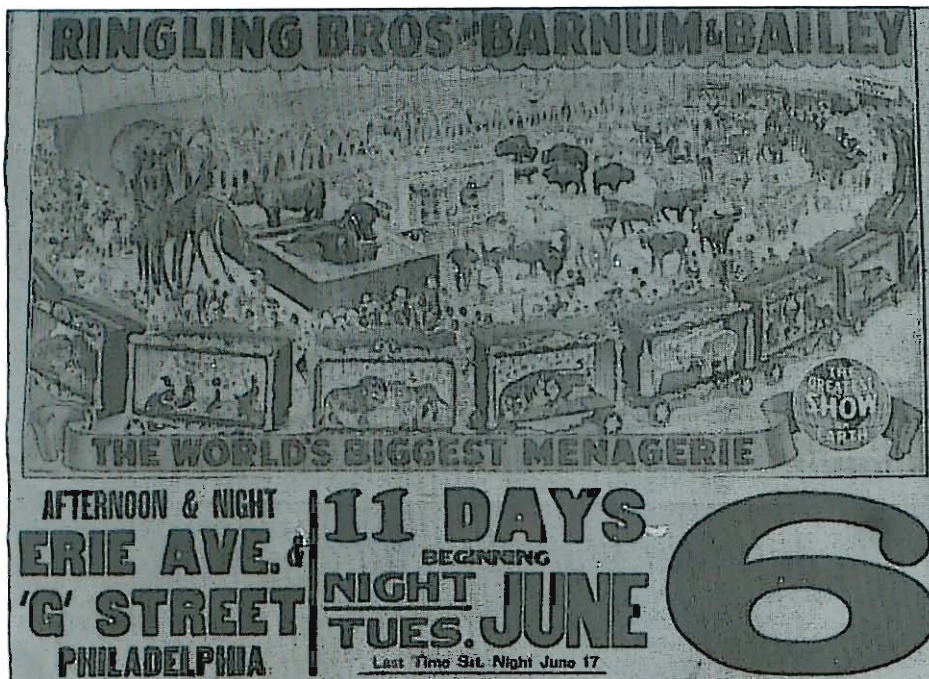
In the fall of 1945, Atlantans were breathing a great sigh of relief over the successful conclusion of World War II. Our soldiers and sailors were beginning to come home, and the rationing of goods and foodstuffs was ending. Nevertheless, clouds of change were gathering, warning that much of what was familiar in a simpler, pre-war Atlanta would soon be gone.

The old was giving way to the new along Highland Avenue too. For on Saturday, Sept. 1, 1945, the very day that the Japanese formally surrendered aboard the U.S.S. Missouri, the last streetcars on the Highland line rumbled across the old bridge at the showgrounds, replaced the next day by gasoline buses.

Two months later the Ringling-Barnum circus would make its 17th and final appearance on the Highland Avenue lot. Given my interest in the matter, that event, more than anything else, seemed to mark the end of an era.

I was then 11 years old, poised on the edge of pubescence. Ahead lay major changes from which there would be no retreat. Things would never again be the same — not for me, not for Atlanta — for a new day was at hand. But enough of such melancholy. Ringling-Barnum's 1945 visit to Atlanta ranks as one of my most enjoyable circus experiences, and I should now tell that story.

Twas a cool, rainy morning in October, or perhaps late September, when the Atlanta Constitution arrived with an announcement that the Greatest Show on Earth would play a three-day engagement in Atlanta, Nov. 5-7, 1945. My mother showed me the news item before I left for school. I was elated. The show had not been here since '43, and I had

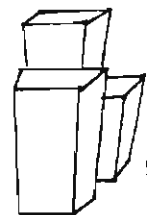
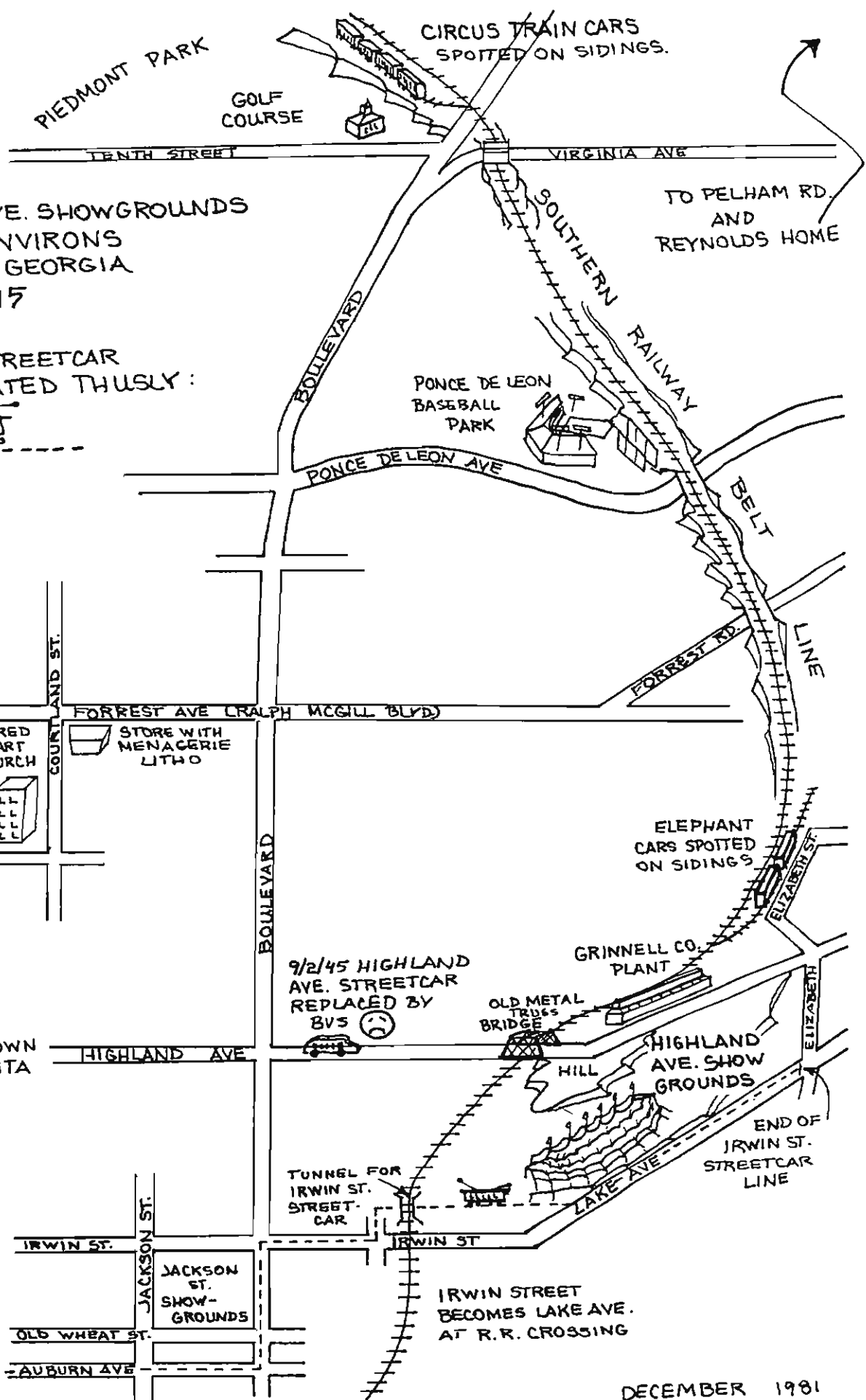
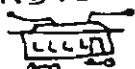


THIS LITHO featuring a beautiful drawing by artist Bill Bailey of the interior of the menagerie was first used by Ringling-Barnum in 1944. Date tail is for the show's stand in Philadelphia that season. (William Watson Collection.)



# HIGHLAND AVE. SHOWGROUNDS AND ENVIRONS ATLANTA, GEORGIA 1945

IRWIN ST. STREETCAR LINE INDICATED THUSLY:



DOWNTOWN ATLANTA

DECEMBER 1981  
MICHAEL REYNOLDS

been apprehensive that the 1944 Hartford fire might take it away for good.

My family did not subscribe to *White Tops* nor did we buy *Billboard* at the newsstand, so I was left to speculate about Ringling-Barnum's fate following the fire. I knew that it had gone back out in '44 playing in stadiums, but that sounded like a poor substitute for what I had come to expect. The forthcoming engagement at Highland Avenue meant the big top had returned, and I was certainly glad of that.

The Atlanta announcement brought the news that a baby rhino would be a featured attraction with the 1945 Ringling-Barnum show. That was *most exciting* for me. Rhinoceroses were my favorite animals, but I was yet to see one. The Atlanta Zoo had never had a rhino up to that time, and the last previous example with Ringling-Barnum had died before I started attending circuses in 1937. I remember riding to school that morning on the "Piedmont Morningside" bus, looking out the window through the rain, and thinking that at last I would finally see a living, breathing rhinoceros.

Ringling-Barnum's 1945 billing crews brought some artwork to Atlanta which I had not previously seen. Among the new lithos was a picture of a mother hippo and youngster. I remember a big multi-sheet of that one plastered against the side of an industrial building along Marietta Street west of the downtown area. Best of all, however, was a beautiful, detailed drawing of the interior of the menagerie by artist Bill Bailey.

I remember to this day exactly where I saw the litho — in the window of a store located in those days on the ground floor of a building at the southeastern corner of Forrest Avenue (now Ralph McGill Boulevard) and Courtland Street. The building is still there and houses the John Marshall Law School.

When the circus came to town in the autumn of 1945, I was a sixth-grade patrol boy for the Sacred Heart Parochial School located on Courtland Street in the block south of Forrest. Armed with belt and badge and carrying a large yellow and black "STOP" sign, one of my regular assignments was to assist and protect the children trying to cross the busy Courtland-Forrest intersection. This gave me plenty of opportunity to study the details of that wonderful menagerie litho.

I coveted the circus menagerie sign and just had to have it. Finally screwing up my courage, I went into the establishment one day and asked the manager whether I could take the litho after the show was gone. To my utter ecstasy, he responded in the affirmative. Afraid that was too good to be true, I went back several days later and asked for it again. Not knowing one youngster from another of the many that passed that way everyday, he had forgotten who I was and responded, "No! — I have already promised it to another boy." I was dismayed until further conversation proved that I was the earlier commitment to which he had referred.

As soon as the circus left town, I scrambled onto a chair and carefully removed the menagerie picture from the window. And, that is how I obtained my very first circus lithograph. It hung for years in my bedroom. I hate to admit it, but there came a day, around 1950, when I took it down and gave it



Photo No. 43—Ringling-Barnum sidewalled menagerie, Allentown, Pa., July 6-7, 1945. Photo by Robert D. Good (Gordon Potter Collection)

away. My recollection is that I had simply gotten tired of it, could think of no other good place to put it and, suffering from a spate of teenage impetuosity, simply got rid of it. I later purchased another copy from E.W. Adams, an old trouper living in retirement in Atlanta, but that one does not have the Highland Avenue date tail, the part I now miss the most.

During its under-canvas days, Ringling-Barnum played Atlanta during the football season. My father was an avid fan and by 1945 had so infused me with the excitement of the gridiron that I also had a keen interest in that sport. For my birthday in September of that year, he had acquired for us a pair of season tickets to the Saturday afternoon Georgia Tech home games. And, we also regularly attended the games (usually on Friday nights) played by his old Marist high school which I too would attend beginning the next year.

The first weekend in November would be filled with activities. On Friday night, Nov. 2, 1945, I went with friends to see Marist play Atlanta's Boys High on the gridiron at Ponce de Leon Baseball Park. This old stadium, "Poncey" as it was called, was the home of the Atlanta Crackers of the minor league AA Southern Association, but its uses were multifarious.

In earlier days, it had even been used by circuses (some as large as Barnum & Bailey in 1917 and Ringling-Barnum in 1919 and 1922) who had crammed themselves inside, pitching their tents on the playing fields. "Poncey's" right field sign boards backed up against a high embankment upon which ran Southern Railways' belt line, the same track that led to the Highland showgrounds a mile to the south. That Friday night, sitting in the grandstand and watching Boys High beat our Marist squad by a score of 20-0, I looked up into the dark above the right field sign boards and thought that on Sunday the Ringling-Barnum trains would pass that very spot en route to Highland Avenue.

The weather had been drizzly on Friday night and on Saturday real rain came. Dad and I were scheduled to go to Grant Field that afternoon to see the Georgia Tech "Yellow Jackets" play the Duke "Blue Devils." However, because of the wet weather, he decided to dispose of our tickets and to leave the office early Saturday afternoon so we could catch the game at home on the radio.

The Saturday rain bothered me because I was afraid it might force cancellation of our plans to watch the Ringling-Barnum show unload the next day. Fortunately, the weather front passed on during the night, and

Sunday was clear and sunny although a bit on the nippy side.

The circus was supposed to arrive and unload on Sunday, Nov. 4, 1945. Taking a lesson from '43 when we stood on the Highland Avenue lot all of a Sunday afternoon waiting for the circus to arrive, my parents decided to check the 1945 arrival situation in advance.

So, at the conclusion of a late morning Mass, our family drove home via Highland Avenue, the object being to see if anything was happening at the showgrounds, just as Dad and I had done in '43 when we made the same preliminary check while riding the Highland Avenue streetcar.

As we moved east along that street I could see that a crowd had gathered on the bridge up ahead. They were looking down at the railroad tracks and the lot. "It must be there," said I; and this time it was. Rolling from behind those billboards that blocked the view of the lot until the last moment, I saw below a string of Ringling-Barnum flatcars. Some of the wagons had already been unloaded and others were awaiting their turn.

We kept on driving, and I caught but a fleeting glimpse, enough, however, to see that not much setting up had been done. I remember deducing that only the first section of the circus train had arrived.

My grandmother Reynolds had been to church with us, and after dropping her off at her home, we drove on to our place for lunch. It must have been around 2 p.m. when we — my father, mother, sister, and I — returned to the showgrounds. Dad had parked the car on Highland Avenue a block northeast of Elizabeth Street, and we hoofed it for the lot.

When we paused to walk across Elizabeth, I looked northwest, behind the Grinnell Co. plant, and saw a steam switch engine hooked behind some Ringling-Barnum sleepers. It was working hard, pushing them up the steep grade of the belt line toward the bridge and the showgrounds. The thing that struck me most about the sleepers was their color. They were red instead of the familiar silver. And that was not all, for I soon found that the flats and stock cars were both painted yellow, another departure from the silver of all the earlier years I could recall.

Entering the lot we first came upon a group of wagons covered with tarpaulins. My father said they were menagerie cages. This was most reassuring because I vividly recalled my disappointment over the missing menagerie in 1943 and was apprehensive about what the future held for my favorite

part of the circus.

Walking through the cage wagons I saw to our left a work elephant pulling a plow held in the ground by one of the working men. The ground was soft and easily turned. They were laying an oval furrow that I took to represent the place where the sideshow would be erected.

Swinging to our right toward the Southern Railway sidings we climbed the gentle slope of the hill that stood at that place and, looking back, took in the entire panorama of the afternoon unloading activity. Nearest us on the sidings stood a single bull car painted yellow with red lettering. The door was partially open and I could see that elephants were inside although others were working out on the lot.

Further south, extending around the bend at the rear of the lot, stood a string of yellow flatcars. They were being unloaded with the wagons rolling along the cars toward us and thence down the runs which were placed in the usual location. My memory tells me these wagons carried rigging and apparatus for the big top, and I concluded that I was watching the unloading of the second section. So, too, I figure the red sleepers I had just seen being shoved on the steep grade were working men's cars attached to this part of the train.

As usual, the Sunday afternoon showgrounds were thronged with Atlantans dodging the crawler tractors which were busily shuttling back and forth bringing wagons from the runs and returning for more. At this point in the day, neither the menagerie nor the big top were up, but there was much preliminary work being done on the latter.

Near the base of the gentle slope from which we had been watching was spotted a closed cage wagon whose attendant was standing at ease alongside. I noted that he was a friendly sort, and appeared willing to answer questions posed by curious onlookers, and this soon included me. The man assured me that the circus did indeed have the menagerie with it that year, including the giraffes and the big hippo which had been missing in '43. I specifically asked about zebras, and he said there were none.

Recalling the modernistic decor of the cages in the last Ringling-Barnum menageries I had been in 1941 and 1942, I asked the man whether, this year, the interiors of the cage wagons were painted with scenery (representing the habitats of the animals), but he did not seem to know what I was talking about. However, he did teach me something new.

I noted that in mentioning different animals, the keeper would refer to the numbers on their cage wagons, and it dawned on me, for the first time, that those numbers were the key to identifying and distinguishing the contents and function of different wagons. And, so it was that I was introduced to one of the sacrosanct disciplines of serious circus fandom.

The menagerie man stated that the big hippo was in cage wagon No. 88, and I fixed that number in my mind forevermore. I wanted to know specifically about the baby rhinoceros. He said it was most definitely with the show, looked out across the lot as though to see if he could spot its wagon, thought for a moment, and then gave me the cage number. I vowed to locate that one before we left the lot that day.

Two giraffe wagons stood at the spot on the lot where memory told me the menagerie



Photo No. 54—Ringling-Barnum on lot at Milwaukee, Wis. (West Allis), Aug. 17-19, 1945. Photo by Wm. A. Uthmeier (Gordon Potter Collection)

would be set up. A keeper was opening the rear Dutch doors so they could be fed. We got up close and caught a good look as the head and neck of one of those beautiful animals swung out, its nose pointed down to a bucket of vegetable matter which the keeper hoisted up inside the wagon. This activity drew quite a circle of onlookers, but the wagons were soon re-closed, and workmen began driving stakes to anchor the portable giraffe corrals.

Now came the flurry of activity as cage wagon after cage wagon seemed to come rolling up from all directions to be spotted in a long row on the eastern or Lake Avenue side of the lot. Had I been more knowledgeable, I would have perceived that we were watching the cage wagons being spotted in the final layout of the menagerie, and I would have questioned how that was possible since the tent had not been erected.

A crawler-type tractor came growling and clanking by in front of us pulling a heavy red wagon on the back of which, in white numerals, was painted the number "88". I knew from what the menagerie man had said that this was the big hippo den. As further proof I noted the heavy water tank underneath, the rear of which was painted with silver or white scroll. After this wagon was lined up, I saw a keeper remove its lower sideboards, and I got a good look at the big Nile hippopotamus while she was fed and her water supply refurnished.

The northernmost cage in the long row bore the number that I thought the menagerie man had given for the wagon containing the baby rhino. As I watched, a keeper unfastened its tarpaulin, stepped behind the flapping canvas, lowered the sideboards, and proceeded to feed the occupant. The canvas blocked my view, and I tried to get closer so I would catch a glimpse of the animal that was my favorite. I could see something moving inside, but I was shooed away before I could distinguish the critter.

The ground was wet from Saturday's heavy rain. Late in the afternoon we saw a local laundry truck get stuck in the mud. It had apparently been over to the sleepers to pick up a load of dirty clothes. Its driver was frustrated, his wheels slipping and spinning in the soft ground. Then, behind him loomed a big work elephant. Its keeper eased the big brute's head into the rear of the vehicle; and with shouts of "Push, Eva, Push", the truck leapt forward and spun away toward the entrance to the lot.

The sun was now well down, and the lot took on a dusky hue. All six big top center poles were up, standing out against the still

light sky. However, the canvas top had not been raised, and I later heard that was not done until Monday morning. With our feet getting cold on the damp, chilly ground, we started for home.

While getting into our trusty '39 Chevrolet, we saw a team of work elephants, side by side in harness, come out of the showgrounds onto Highland Avenue and plod our way. Before reaching us, however, they turned north into Elizabeth Street. Dad decided to follow them in the car.

North of Highland, Elizabeth Street ran roughly parallel to Southern's belt line, and after several blocks we saw the work elephants turn left into an open area alongside the railroad and next to a lumber yard. They were joining what looked like the rest of the herd assembled in front of their railroad cars. With the temperature dropping, and no menagerie tent set up on the lot, the elephants were probably going to be re-loaded into their cars so they could spend the night out of the cold. But why here?

My guess is that the bull cars were spotted away from the showgrounds to relieve rail car congestion there, and this Elizabeth Street siding was selected because it was only a short elephant walk from the entrance to the lot. The sight was memorable. The sun was now gone, replaced by a faint orange glow on the western horizon, against which were silhouetted the dark shapes of the bull cars and an occasional uplifted trunk.

Father worked his way over to Boulevard and then drove north toward Piedmont Park. It was now totally dark. At the Park, Southern's belt line crosses Boulevard at grade level. This location is about two miles north of the showgrounds and was the customary place for spotting the performers' sleepers and cars for the lead and ring stock. As our auto bumped over the crossing, I knew there must be circus cars spotted on the sidings to my left because I would see the yellow flames of smudge pots flickering in the darkness.

The Sunday circus unloading activities got reasonable coverage in Atlanta's Monday newspapers. However, the front page headlines dealt with an ominous matter — one that foretold a coming American calamity — for they reported how the Chinese Communist Army was rampaging through Inner Mongolia, and spoke of rumored clashes between the Communists and U.S. Marines stationed on mainland China. But that was far, far away, and Monday was a beautiful warm and sunny day, made more so because we were set to see the circus.

That year I would attend an evening performance of the Greatest Show on Earth; the first such experience for me. I naturally wanted to get there early so I could spend as much time as possible in the menagerie. The "Piedmont Morningside" bus ran in front of our house, and I anxiously watched for it to deliver my father who had promised to come home early so our family could eat and get going. My good friend and schoolmate, Eddie Fechtel, had already been to the matinee and had advised via telephone that he had seen the baby rhinoceros and that it was alive and well. Dad finally arrived, we quickly supped, and were off.

It was a clear night and not uncomfortably cool. Dad again parked on Highland Avenue east of Elizabeth Street, and we joined the throngs filing along the narrow sidewalks up Highland Avenue toward the entrance to the lot. I was bursting with excitement and the walk seemed uncommonly slow. And then we were there: crowded, brightly lit midway, side show on the left, ticket wagons, food, and novelty stands on the right — barkers chanting, generators humming, and hot dogs grilling — nothing could equal those sights, sounds, and smells. Pressing forward through the Main Entrance, we entered my holy of holies, the menagerie. But wait a minute!

There was no menagerie tent, and we

found ourselves right back in the open air. The animal display was simply enclosed within a canvas sidewall with nothing overhead but a starry November sky. This was the first time I had ever heard about, or seen, an open-air menagerie. Recovering from our surprise, we all agreed that, while certainly different, it was most pleasant.

Curving around to our right, on the railroad side of the lot, was the elephant picket line while, to our left, stood the long row of cage wagons the spotting of which we had witnessed the evening before. Thinking that the first wagon in the lineup held the rhinoceros, and recalling my frustration at not being able to see the occupant on yesterday, I went straight to it.

Surprise! It was not the rhino. Instead, the cage contained a hartebeest and a gnu. Obviously, I had gotten the wrong wagon yesterday. Puzzled, I moved with my folks along the cage row and then spied the rhino, behind us in the center of the menagerie, the open side of his cage wagon facing our way. We made a beeline for that spot.

"Bobby", the little male African black "two horned" rhinoceros, was standing up in his cage, facing us, and contentedly munching his fare. I spent a long time looking at him, the very first living rhinoceros I had ever seen. He had been born in 1944 at

Chicago's Brookfield Zoo and was acquired by Ringling-Barnum early in the '45 season. His was only the second rhinoceros birth in captivity in the Western Hemisphere, and the circus was ballyhooing that fact.

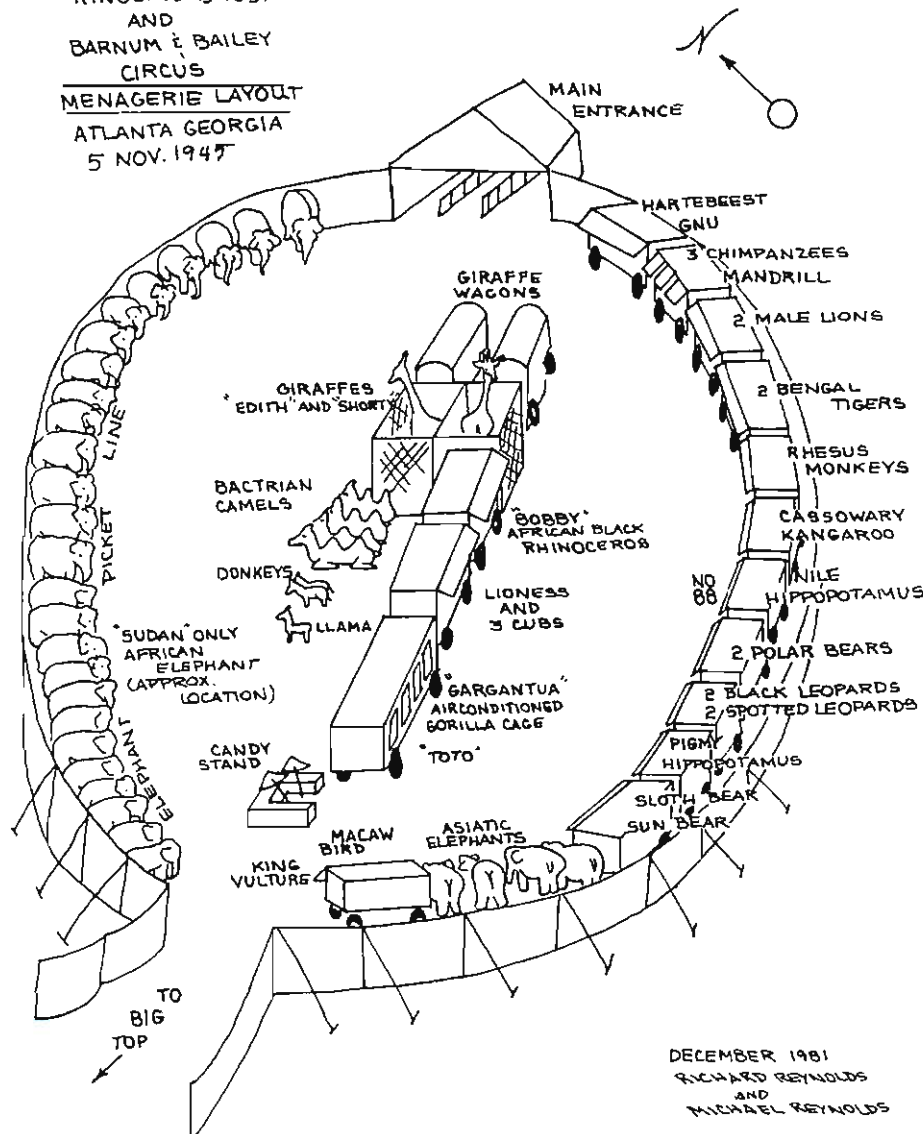
To the left of Bobby's wagon, in a folding chair, sat his keeper dressed in the uniform of the menagerie attendants. He was an elderly, friendly man, and since the rhino was obviously young, I asked for its age. As I recall, the keeper said "18 months" which was erroneous, the youngster then being only a year old.

Facing the rhino cage, the giraffe corral, was to the right. There were two of them. They were my little sister Marianna's favorite animals, and we spent some time looking at them. I remember distinctly that one was standing and the other lying down. We had purchased a '45 program, and it contained a picture of the giraffes, identifying them by the names "Edith" and "Shorty."

I made my first check list of circus animals from those I saw in Ringling-Barnum's 1945 menagerie. I carefully memorized the contents of each cage wagon and the next day made a sketch of the menagerie which, with artistic refinements by my son Michael, is duplicated here. I did not record the number of each of the cage wagons and, while my effort was lacking in that detail, it nevertheless represented my first endeavor as a serious student of the circus.

Here is my list of the 12 cage wagons in the long row on the eastern or Lake Avenue side of the menagerie (proceeding from the Main Entrance), to wit:

RINGLING BROS.  
AND  
BARNUM & BAILEY  
CIRCUS  
MENAGERIE LAYOUT  
ATLANTA GEORGIA  
5 NOV. 1947



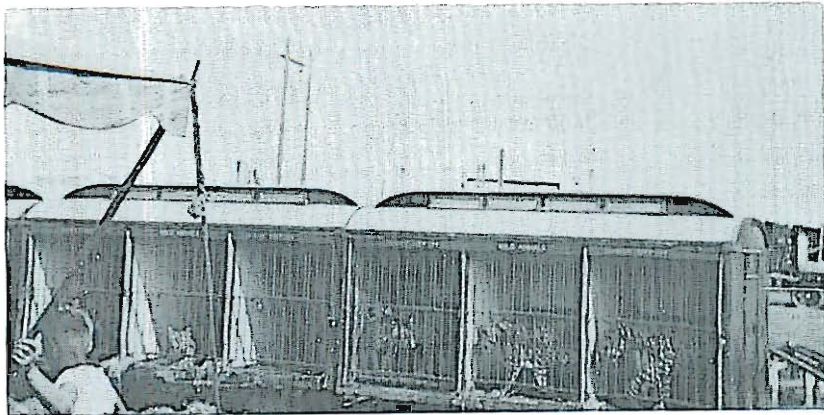
Cage Wagon	Contents
No. _____	1 Hartebeest and 1 white bearded (or brindled?) gnu
No. _____	3 Chimpanzees and 1 Mandrill
No. _____	2 Male lions
No. _____	2 Bengal tigers
No. _____	Rhesus monkeys (number not counted)
No. _____	1 Cassowary and 1 Kangaroo (species unidentified)
No. 88	1 Nile hippopotamus
No. _____	2 Polar bears
No. _____	2 Black leopards and 2 Spotted leopards
No. _____	1 Pigmy hippopotamus
No. _____	1 Sloth bear and 1 Sun bear.

Here the cage row was broken by four (4) elephants that had been picketed on this side of the menagerie.

No. \_\_\_\_\_ 2 Macaws and Bird (unidentified) and 1 King vulture

Cage line ended at menagerie exit to big top.

In the center of the menagerie were three other cages: African rhinoceros, mother lion with three cubs, and the big air-conditioned wagon for the two gorillas, "Gargantua" and "Toto". So, excluding the two giraffe vans, there was a total of 15 cage wagons in the menagerie. I should state, positively, that both of the gorillas were in the same wagon, and it was painted red instead of the white of 1943 and earlier years. In fact, all of the cages were painted red with their numbers, carvings, and scroll-work painted either white or silver. I remarked that the modernistic decor of '41 and '42 was gone. My father replied that Robert Ringling and his mother had done away with all that fancy stuff in favor of



**Photo No. 56**—Cages with animals used in the "Leopard Women" act on lot at Milwaukee, Wis., Aug. 17-19, 1945. Photo by Wm. A. Uthmeier (Gordon Potter Collection)

traditional circus colors.

The lead stock, tethered in the center of the menagerie, consisted of four bactrian or two-humped camels, two donkeys, and one llama. This was the weakest part of the menagerie display in comparison to pre-war editions. Back then there were always a dozen or so camels and a goodly number of zebras, the latter missing altogether in 1945.

When my parents had decided to attend a nighttime performance, I had been concerned that the animals might be asleep and not displaying to good advantage. Quite the contrary was true, perhaps due in some measure to the cool temperature in the open-air menagerie.

The big Nile hippo drew quite a crowd. Years later I would learn that it was a female named "Chester". She put on quite a show. Standing on the dry deck in the forward end of her cage, she tossed her head and opened her cavernous mouth to the oohs and ahs of the onlookers. Several cages away the smaller pigmy hippopotamus, the female named "Betty Lou", was similarly disporting herself.

Most of the elephants were picketed in a long line on the other side of the menagerie. I did not make a count, but there must have been around 30 bulls that year. In reviewing them we were assisted by one of the members of the elephant department. Perhaps he took to us because we seemed to know more about the pachyderms than the usual circus visitors.

I remember telling him that I had liked the African pigmy elephant, "Puqua" and that she had been one of those to die from poisoning in Atlanta in 1941. He said I was correct and pointed out her old companion "Sudan", the only African in the '45 herd. She was staked out about half way along the picket line. I remember thinking that for a so-called "pigmy" she certainly was a big animal, just about the same size as the Indian elephants next to her.

The bull man took us up and down the line of swaying giants giving the names and describing the personalities of the various individuals as we passed. He pointed out a particularly gentle female, proved his point by walking between her front legs and under her belly, and then invited my six-year-old sister to sit upon the elephant's head. Politely, my parents declined the offer. Now it was time to head for the big top.

Fire precautions were much in evidence. When we had earlier passed from the midway into the Main Entrance, I had spied,

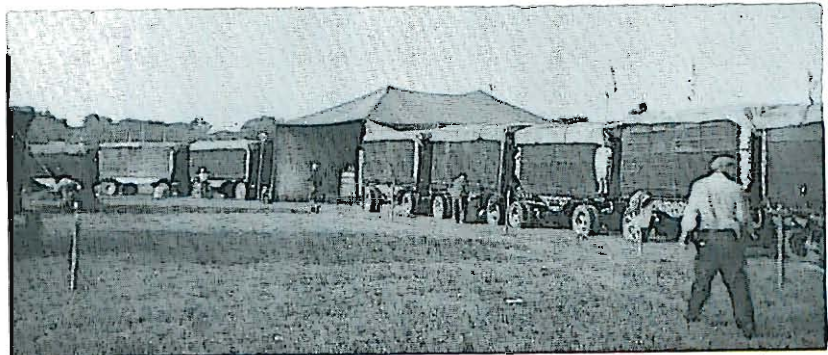
off to the side, an Atlanta fire engine with crew in dress uniform. The horror of the Hartford holocaust was still fresh in everyone's mind, and the high visibility of the Atlanta fire department was certainly calculated to be reassuring. There had been plenty of advance publicity about the flame resistant canvas. Yet, the city may have required the presence of its fire department before granting an exhibit license.

In the big top, I remember electrically illuminated "Exit" and "No Smoking" signs. The grandstand was broken here and there by escape passages, and the chairs were made of metal instead of the wood of earlier years. More Atlanta firemen were positioned inside.

Our seats in the grandstand were near the center ring, on the eastern or Lake Avenue side of the tent. As we walked in that direction along the hippodrome track, we came upon some small peculiar looking cage wagons. They contained leopards. The front cage was up close to the steel arena, and the last one jutted out into the hippodrome track. I seem to remember that we had to step around them. This was something new to me. In the past, performing animals for the big cage act had always come into the steel arena through tunnels or runways leading from wagons spotted outside the big top.

I had never seen anything quite like these dens parked in the hippodrome track. They were small, not much taller than I, and the configuration of their roofs was like that of railroad passenger cars. Of course they were the European-style wagons used to transport Alfred Court's performing leopards and pumas.

Taking my seat, I surveyed the layout of the big top. It was the same as in '43 with the



**Photo No. 58**—Cages in Ringling-Barnum sidewalled menagerie at Milwaukee, Wis., Aug. 17-19, 1945. Photo by Wm. A. Uthmeier (Gordon Potter Collection)

performers' entrance and bandstand down at the round end toward the rear of the Highland Avenue lot. The big top had six poles, and there were three rings and two stages. A good crowd was on hand when Merle Evans struck up the band to start the Monday evening performance.

The 1945 performance was on par with that of '43. However, it was not quite up to the standard set in 1941 nor the post-war '47 and '48 editions when new European talent was once again being imported.

I remember Alfred Court's unusual wild animal act featuring show girls in the arena with pumas and black and spotted leopards. I had not seen leopards perform since 1941, it being my firm recollection, then as now, that the leopards had not appeared with the Court act at the Atlanta performances I had seen in '42 and '43.

At the end of the ladies and leopards number, a crawler-type tractor came into the big top, hooked onto the smallish European performing animal wagons, and took them out of the tent through the back door. I vividly recall that the tractor was painted orange, the only time I ever saw that color on the Ringling-Barnum tractors.

The "Alice In Wonderland" spectacle began, according to my memory, with Alice dressed in blue appearing in the center ring for a short skit after which the procession started around the hippodrome track. I remember the great bandwagon. It was identified in our program by the name "Five Graces." There was another beautiful old wagon painted white with gold carvings. I later learned from the wagon buffs to call this one the "Lion and Gladiator." That night, it rolled around the hippodrome track carrying some oriental show girls dressed in white plumes.

The various characters from Lewis Carroll's story duly made their appearance. I particularly recall the "Mad Hatter." He and the others went through their paces in the rings and on the stages. At some dramatic point Alice raced from the big top and then re-appeared, at the end of the procession, riding in a throne-like chair high atop a float made in the shape of a great white swan.

Lalage was the featured female aerialist in 1945. At the climax of her routine she hung by one hand from a rope attached to the ceiling of the big top. As the drums rolled she tossed her body up over her head, dropped, used the downward momentum to whip her body upside down again, and repeated these revolutions over and over while the crowd counted aloud the number of turns. My father called this stunt the giant plange and told me that it was made famous by Lillian Leitzel with the Ringling show in the teens

and twenties. Dad was complimentary of the effort by Mlle. Lalage but said it was not as good as the routine he had seen performed by Leitzel whom he considered to be the greatest circus performer of all time, an opinion which I have found to be shared by many.

Roland Tiebor's trained California sea lions were entertaining. Those sleek animals were brought into the big top from their cage wagon in the back yard and put on a good demonstration of their balancing ability and horn blowing.

Another number in the '45 show featured a gymnast performing on a trampoline set upon one of the stages next to the center rig. There was a big blue covering over the device so that it had the outward appearance of a large rectangular box upon whose elastic top the performer did his bouncing routine. I do not believe I had previously seen a trampoline act with the Ringling-Barnum show.

Of the '45 funsters, I best remember Paul Jerome. He was a Charlie type, i.e. charcoal face with exaggerated white mouth. Jerome was noted for the electrical gimmicks he wore. I saw him many times, but 1945 stands out. He stopped on the hippodrome track below us and focused his attention on a lady sitting at ground level. With face of pathos and eyes aflutter, he blinked the light on the end of his nose and illuminated a big red heart that he wore over his breast.

The finale of the 1945 performance was an elephant production number. For its conclusion, an unusually tall stool was placed on the mid-point of the track in front of us. Shorter stools were put to either side. Pachyderms then climbed onto these stools forming themselves in a pyramid. This became the center point of a long mount extending in each direction down the hippodrome. Then, the 1945 show was over.

The menagerie had to be negotiated on the way out, and I hoped to catch one last look at the baby rhinoceros. In the past, when attending Ringling-Barnum matinees, I had always enjoyed a leisurely visit in the animal tent following the show. However, I found there would be no lingering after this evening performance. It did not seem to be permitted as the crowd pushed us forward toward the front door. I definitely did not like this part of nighttime circus going.

Our path took us via the long row of cages. The wagons along that sidewall were still open with their lights on inside. I remember that the big hippo was sleeping upon the dry deck of her wagon. Coming to the rhino cage on my left, I was disappointed to discover that its sideboards had been closed and "Bobby" could not be seen. This was undoubtedly a precautionary measure to protect the young animal from the cool night air in the sidewalled animal exhibit. The same was true for the giraffes next door. Their corral was empty, for they were spending the night closed up inside their wagons spotted alongside. Now we were back out on the bustling and crowded midway, but could not linger. It was late and tomorrow, Tuesday, was a school day.

Reaching the street, I looked back in fond farewell to the Highland lot and its wondrous, transient tenant, The Greatest Show On Earth. I did not know it at the time, but that would be my very last glimpse of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus on those hallowed grounds.

On Sunday March 10, 1946, four months



**Photo No. 59—**Portion of sidewalled menagerie with big top in rear, Milwaukee, Wis., Aug. 17-19, 1945. Photo by Wm. A. Uthmeier (Gordon Potter Collection)

after I had seen the big show at Highland Avenue. Mother called my attention to a disturbing front page story in the *Atlanta Constitution*. The article, written by Rolfe Edmondson, carried the headline "TENTS MAY RISE NO MORE ON OLD CIRCUS GROUNDS", and told how, during the preceding week, the Healey Real Estate & Improvement Co. had sold the Highland Avenue showgrounds. While the new owners did not specifically announce their plans for the property, the article speculated that a building would be built on the site. And, that is what happened, but not for some time to come.

After an absence of two years, the Ringling-Barnum show returned to Atlanta in 1947. It set up in the Lakewood Park fairgrounds way out on the south side of town. It played there in '48, '49, and '50 as well, notwithstanding the fact that, throughout that entire time, the Highland Avenue lot lay absolutely dormant.

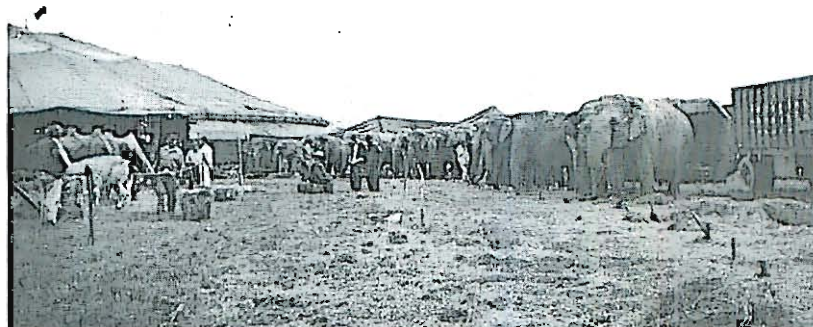
Just why the old showgrounds were not used I cannot say. Perhaps a satisfactory rental fee could not be arranged. Maybe it was parking. There were no parking lots as such on or near the Highland Avenue showgrounds. Here and there a nearby homeowner would give his small yard to the cause, and some spots could be found in the driveways and service yards of surrounding industrial plants and businesses. For the most part, however, one had to search for a curbside spot along the streets in the surrounding neighborhood. By contrast, Lakewood Park offered bountiful parking which, in light of the post-war increase in

automobiles, may have made it more attractive. Whatever the reason, 1945 was the finale for Ringling-Barnum at the Highland Avenue showgrounds.

This story must not end by leaving the impression that the Highland Avenue showgrounds never hosted another circus. That would be wrong because two small motorized shows were granted permission to use the old grounds in 1952. They were the Rogers Brothers and Kelly-Morris circuses which appeared there in April and September, respectively, of that year. Your writer saw the Rogers Brothers layout. I was then much older; but even allowing for the changes in perspective wrought by my maturation, the little Rogers show seemed lost in the vastness of those showgrounds. It simply was not The Greatest Show On Earth whose awesome size had made such an early and lasting impression.

The Highland Avenue lot lost its physical familiarity only grudgingly. Along its back side, the Irwin streetcar plied back and forth on Lake Avenue for three years after the 1945 Ringling-Barnum engagement before being replaced by trackless trolleys.

The Highland Avenue lot was lost forever in 1953 when its three levels were graded down and construction was begun on the Montag Brothers stationery plant. Completed in 1954, the factory faces onto Lake Avenue which was the back side of the property in its circus days. Though the showgrounds' entrance on Highland is now only a rear gate, it is still recognizable from the old days. Meanwhile, the plant and its property have become part of the Mead Corp.



**Photo No. 60—**Elephants and lead stock in Ringling-Barnum sidewalled menagerie, Milwaukee, Wis., Aug. 17-19, 1945. Photo by Wm. A. Uthmeier (Gordon Potter Collection)



The Southern Railway belt line is still there; and the metal truss bridge is still standing. It was erected in 1892, carrying Highland Avenue over the railroad tracks, and many a spectator used it to watch circus trains being unloaded below. But, its days are numbered. Judged unsafe, the old bridge was closed forever to vehicular traffic in March 1981. The city plans to eventually replace it with a modern structure. When that happens the final chapter will indeed have been written in the farewell to the Highland Avenue showgrounds.

—cfa—

## Take a Kid to a Circus!

# Bobby the Rhinoceros ends lengthy rhino-less run under RBBB tent

by Richard J. Reynolds, III

For nine seasons, 1936 through 1944, the menagerie of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus had been without a rhinoceros. This was the longest "rhino-less" stretch in the big show's under canvas history. That drought, if it may be called such, came to an end in 1945 with the acquisition of "Bobby" a male of the two-horned African black species *Diceros bicornis*.

*bicornis*.

As best I can determine, the combined Ringling-Barnum show exhibited only four (4) rhinos prior to 1945. They were:

"Bill" — A male great Indian rhinoceros. This species has only one horn, and its skin is arranged in distinctive folds so that it has an armored appearance. "Bill" was a veteran trouser when he came to the combined show in 1919. He went way back to about 1907 with the Baraboo brothers who had him on their Ringling show, their rejuvenated Forepaugh-Sells outfit of 1910 and 1911 and also Barnum & Bailey from whence he came to the combination. "Bill" died on the road with Ringling-Barnum at Ft. Worth, Texas on Sept. 28, 1926. He was the last Indian rhinoceros exhibited by an American circus and must rank as one of the most valuable circus animals of this century.

"Bill" (No. 2) — A male of the two-horned African black variety. He joined Ringling-Barnum at Madison Square Garden in April 1929 and was given the same name as his predecessor who had died three years earlier, the show having gone without a rhinoceros in 1927 and 1928. "Bill" (No. 2) toured every year until his death on the road at Knoxville, Tenn., on Oct. 25, 1935.

"Lil" — A female African black rhino who was on the show for several years as a mate for "Bill" (No. 2). I have not determined just when she first joined, but it must have been around 1930. She was there for sure in 1931, 1932, and 1933, but died at the end of '33 or early '34.

"Mary" — Another female African black, who had starred in M.G.M.'s movie *Tarzan and His Mate*. Sold to Ringling-Barnum as a replacement for the deceased "Lil", "Mary" was shipped to Sarasota quarters in October 1934. She started the '35 season, but died at Springfield, Mass., on July 5, 1935.

As noted above, Ringling-Barnum began its long rhino dearth when it lost both "Bill" (No. 2) and "Mary" in 1935. That same year, on June 21, the renowned German animal collector, Christoph Schulz, accompanied by his son Walter, arrived in Boston aboard the ship *S.S. City of Lyons*, with a huge shipment of animals, including eight giraffes and three African black rhinoceroses.

Two giraffes would be purchased by the Ringling-Barnum organization, one for the big show and the other for Hagenbeck-Wallace, both delivered to the respective circuses during the '35 season.

It is the trio of rhinos, however, which are important to this story. Two of them, a pair to become known as "Mary" and "Pharo" (or "Pharoah") were destined for the new Chicago Zoological Park that had opened at Brookfield, Ill., the previous year. There they would become famous as the parents of the first African rhinoceroses born in captivity in the world and the first rhinos of any kind born in the western hemisphere.

Their first offspring, a male named "Georgie-Joe" was born at the Brookfield Zoo on Oct. 7, 1941. He stayed there until November 1943 when he was sent to the Pittsburgh Zoo where he lived until his death

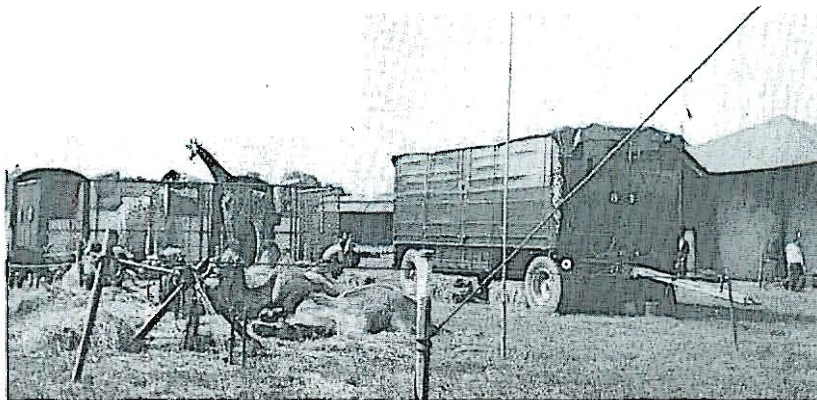


Photo No. 61—Ringling-Barnum sidewalled menagerie at Milwaukee, Wis., Aug. 17-19, 1945. Pictured are camels with giraffes in rear and at right cage No. 85 housing the rhino, Bobby. Photo by Wm. A. Uthmeier (Gordon Potter Collection).

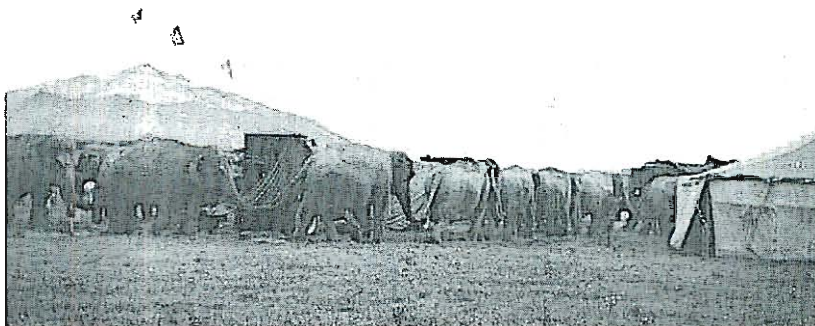


Photo No. 62—Elephants on Ringling-Barnum lot, Milwaukee, Wis., Aug. 17-19, 1945. Photo by Wm. A. Uthmeier (Gordon Potter Collection)

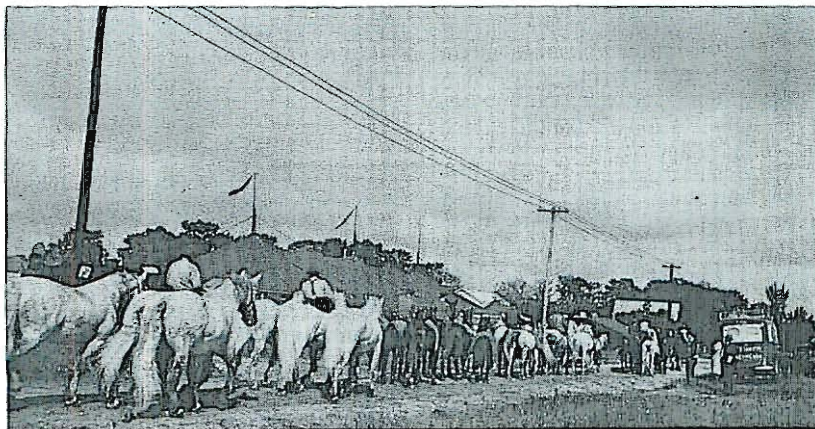


Photo No. 63—Ringling-Barnum ring stock enroute to lot at Tampa, Fla., Nov. 20-21, 1945. Photo by Eddie Jackson (Gordon Potter Collection)