

## RICHARD J. REYNOLDS III TURNS 80

By Ken Kawata

The temperature was nearing the upper end of the 30 degrees C range and with high humidity, the air was oppressive in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was in 2011 and Richard Reynolds, my wife Jean and I had an appointment with the senior staff. Our rented car pulled up at a service gate of the zoo. Soon we stepped into the off-exhibit Sumatran rhino holding area, and we were allowed to “pet” Suci, a female, and to give her apple slices. This was the occasion that Reynolds described as “my all time zoo experience. ...There was a time when I never thought I’d ever see a living Sumatran rhino let alone touch and feed one.” (Reynolds, 2011) Afterwards we reviewed all exhibits while the merciless sun kept beating down upon us. Hours later we finished the day, and crawled back to the car; I turned up the air conditioner all the way, but that helped little. Near our hotel I spotted a small ice cream parlor, and without a word we staggered in. Licking a spoon, I was still mesmerized by Richard’s boyish fascination for the beast. It was, as Jean noted, “seeing a little kid in a candy store.”

Whoever takes a deeper interest in the history of rhinoceroses in captivity will eventually come across the name Richard J. Reynolds III, along with Kees Rookmaaker. Since early childhood he took a keen interest in wild animals, particularly large herbivores such as rhinos and elephants, and large carnivores including giant pandas and felids. Yet he is not a formally trained zoologist.

A native of Atlanta, Georgia, he followed the professional trail of his father, who was an attorney and practiced law for 46 years. Young Reynolds studied at Emory University, received his Doctor of Law, and in 1958 he was admitted to the practice of law. He specialized in motor carrier transportation, and later became a partner in one of Atlanta’s largest law firms. At age 58 he retired from the practice of law. All through the years, history has been an important part of his activities, and he has participated in many organizations such as the National Railway Historical Society and of those local history; the range of his writings, to be reviewed below, even includes sports articles, published in Auburn University *Alumnews* and the *Jewish Georgian*. He is also a supporter and benefactor of Marist School, his alma mater. [The foregoing is mainly from an eight-page memo to this writer in 1991.]

In terms of animal-related fields, Reynolds served as the president of the Circus Historical Society and is currently its Trustee Emeritus. As for zoos, he prepared the original Articles of Incorporation for the Zoological Society of Atlanta (now Friends of Zoo Atlanta, a zoo support organization). In 1970 he was one of three founding trustees, and served as its vice president. He is now a Trustee Emeritus and also the zoo’s historian. Over the decades he has accumulated an immense volume of materials on circuses, zoos and wildlife, especially captive populations of rare and endangered animals. They include, for instance, books, magazines, reprints, correspondence, photos and notes (when he visits circuses, zoos and museums he

takes copious notes and organizes them, a habit that began early in life). When we first met in the 1970s, over a dinner table he showed me a pile of old black-and-white photos. Some were of circus elephants, while others revealed giant pandas in a rudimentary holding facility with caretakers, apparently photographed in China. I became curious as to how he acquired those rare photos.

With the huge collection of materials comes an in-depth knowledge. Thus Reynolds has carved out a peerless niche within circles of circus and zoo historians. Numerous articles authored by him have appeared in periodicals such as *Bandwagon* (a Circus Historical Society publication), *Der Zoologische Garten*, *International Zoo Yearbook* and *International Zoo News*. For those who seek information and advice such as studbook keepers, he is always willing to offer assistance. Data gathered by him led to his collaborating with Desmond and Ramona Morris in their book *Men and Pandas* (1966), and with Chris Catton in his book *Pandas* (1990). Those who have been engaged in such activities, even on a lesser scale, are aware that it is time-consuming, no easy task for a family man (he and his lovely wife Delia, also a native of Georgia, raised three sons). Delia once told me that, while preparing for a presentation on captive elephant history at an American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (AAZPA) conference, he worked himself to exhaustion.



From left: Richard and Delia Reynolds and the author. Atlanta, 1994.  
Photographer unknown

Hosting overseas visitors to Atlanta is something he enjoys; he has taken Kees Rookmaaker, Tim Brown and Mike Grayson, among others, to his hometown zoo and aquarium. When Herman Reichenbach and company drove up to Atlanta in 2006 Reynolds had fallen ill shortly before, and cancelled any meetings with them. But he did open doors for them at both the zoo and aquarium. They had a very nice guided tour of the zoo by no less than the director at the time (now director of the National Zoo, Washington), which made them realize the weight carried by Reynolds (e-mail, 2014).

Those who meet Reynolds will immediately notice the soft, Southern accent, indicative of the strong Southerner's identify. "I was raised 'Southern,' a great-grandson of a Confederate soldier. He was Joseph Brown Reynolds (1833-1912), a native of County Longford, Ireland who migrated to America in the 1850s and settled in Augusta, GA, along with many others from the 'Old Sod.' During the War of Northern Aggression [the American Civil War, as Northerners call it---KK] he was a member of the Irish Volunteers of Richmond County (Augusta), GA, Company 'C,' 5th Regiment, Georgia Volunteer Infantry, Army of Tennessee, CSA. It was all Irish-Catholic Company." Also: "I was raised at a time when, hereabouts, a child always referred to an adult as Mr. or Mrs. And always said 'Yes sir' or 'Yes ma'am' when addressed by adults---never 'no' or 'yeah.' Those were identified as smart aleck rude expressions as practiced by youngsters in the North, particularly by the aggressive Old Testament kids. Now there was an exception that allowed for familiarity when addressing one's elder relatives. If a given family permitted it, a child could address an aunt or uncle by her or his given names." (E-mail, 2011)



The author with Richard Reynolds at the speaker's table during a Circus Historical Society convention, Nyack, New York, 2004. Photo by Robert Houston

The realization of declining American manners, asserted by him, had already been shared by the majority of citizens a decade earlier (I for one have experienced it frequently). Nearly 70% questioned in a poll said people are ruder than they were 20 or 30 years ago, the trend being noticed in large and small places alike, although more evident in urban communities (Cassata, 2005). Along with it comes another social phenomenon, noticeable even a decade ago: The term history had faded from the national lexicon. David McCullough, a famed historian, responding to an interviewer: “We have a generation of young people who are historically illiterate. This is a serious problem, and it’s been apparent for about 20 years.” (Anon., 2003)

Concurrently, the superficiality of the society has become noticeable. An engineer comments: “I have witnessed the talent pool decrease as older engineers retire. I have seen meetings in which an older gentleman who gives a presentation with meticulously analyzed board drawings is received with yawns, while other employees who put on Power Point presentations but have no idea what they are doing receive standing ovations.” (Parish, 2001) His observation points to the culture of younger people who are inseparable from anything “online”, while viewing print media as something so alien. In short, “It’s gotten to the point where people think if it’s not in Google, it doesn’t exist,” and “You don’t search or research any more, you Google it.” (Price, 2003)

Since Reynolds is an attorney, here follow examples from the law field. A legal librarian notes that students are reluctant to touch a book, and horrified by the required process for obtaining information from books: “the majority of my students have never done an in-depth research project. They have never had to consult primary sources. They lack the basic skill of crosschecking documents to piece together the correct information.” She adds that a 20-minute, straightforward research is a “long time” for them (Janto, 2007). Interestingly a law professor states that, unbeknownst to those students, “Despite tremendous strides in electronic publishing and in digitization technologies, the majority of the world’s published materials remain in physical (print or microform) formats only.” (Wu, 2005)

Indeed, digging into historical materials, hour after hour, by no means guarantees instant gratification, yet it is a requirement to produce even a brief account of any substance in any field. Recently, a colleague asked Reynolds if people in Chicago ever had the opportunity of seeing elephants around 1909, how many African elephants were running around the U.S., especially in Chicago, at the beginning of the last century, and how many were males. The questions were prompted by a conversation with someone concerning two big male African elephants in the main hall of the Field Museum, Chicago. Eight days after receiving the questions, Reynolds provided a meticulously researched account on both African and Asian elephants.

He listed elephants with the years of arrival and sexes from 1884 to 1909, highlighting large Africans. He added citations and some historic illustrations, also noting that the two males at the Field Museum were collected by Carl Akeley in 1905-1906. As for live specimens, circuses brought two large male African elephants to Chicago prior to 1909, one being the legendary Jumbo, 4-14 June 1883 and again 1-6 September 1884; the other was Mike, 26-31 August 1901. Reynolds

also commented that African elephants were rare in the last century prior to World War II. (E-mail to Nigel Rothfels, 2014) That raises the question: Who among the current generation can produce even a simple snapshot of a captive wild animal species at a given period in one country; or publish accounts such as “Alfred Court and His Performing Snow Leopards” (1984), a bibliography of giraffes in American circuses or traveling menageries (1986) or “America’s First Hippo” (1996), just to give a few examples? With a pool of young people armed with graduate degrees in this country, one would hope that a promising new face will someday emerge on the horizon. Thus far, however, the horizon has remained barren.

In the life-long process of seeking knowledge, Reynolds cast a net over a wide range of experts. His friends included William Mann, director of National Zoo, Washington, D.C. (a well-known entomologist and an avid circus enthusiast); Mann’s successor Theodore Reed; Geoffrey Borne, director of the Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center at Emory University, and self-made zoo historian Marvin L. Jones, among others. These men departed this life, and hardly anyone in the younger crowd seems to know who they were, let alone their accomplishments.

In 2001 Kathie Schulz, owner/director of the now-extinct Catskill Game Farm, New York, coined the term Zoo Dinosaur Club, to describe a loosely connected fraternity of old timers. It dawned on me recently that the membership of this Club is steadily shrinking, and Richard Reynolds now represents its senior rank. Upon finding out that 26 September marks Reynolds’ eightieth birthday, Spartaco Gippoliti of Rome suggested: Why not a biographical sketch for *IZN*? So here it is for y’all\*, and a Happy Birthday to Richard!

\*Y’all: a chiefly Southern expression for You-all; I am, after all, also from the Deep South (of Japan).

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