

McLean County Museum of History

Circus Collection

Processed by
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Summer 2012

Collection Information

Volume of Collection:	One Box.
Collection Dates:	1879, 1881, 1904, 1919, 1925-1929, 1948, 1950, 1959, 1962-1998, 2001 and 2003
Restrictions:	Some brittle documents. Use photocopies unless authorized by Librarian / Archivist.
Reproduction Rights:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History.
Location:	Archives
Notes:	For additional information, see: ISU Milner Library Circus Collection

Historical Sketch

Circuses had been visiting the area for many years when around 1875 a small wagon circus came to Bloomington and inspired two local brothers, Howard and Fred Green, to reproduce the trapeze rigging they had seen at this performance in their father's barn on Croxton Avenue and taught themselves the routines they had witnessed. They went on to international fame as "The Great Russian Athletes" and later as "The LaVan Brothers". Other local young people inspired by their success trained as aerialists, also, including Fred Miltemore and Charlie Noble who performed under the name "The Flying Fishers".

When the circus season ended, the LaVan and Fisher acts returned to Bloomington in the winter to practice new acts for the upcoming season. They outgrew the Green's barn and took up headquarters at the old ice house on South Robinson Street at Olive Street and

later moved to the Lake Erie and Western Rail roundhouse on South Gridley. Bloomington became the center of activity for aerialist training and trapeze act recruitment in the United States. The Pantagraph called it the “World Capital for Aerialists”. Over the years more than 210 people from the Bloomington area became circus performers.

Though the circus has lost much of its popularity today, there is still circus activity today in the area. Illinois State University’s Gamma Phi Circus was founded in 1929 by Dr. Clifford “Pop” Horton as an honorary gymnastics fraternity which still trains young people and holds performances today.

Scope and Content Notes

The Circus collection consists of 1 box and 10 folders containing material from 1879, 1881, 1904, 1919, 1925-1929, 1948, 1950, 1959, 1962-1998, 2001 and 2003. Items in the collection include newspaper clippings, magazine articles, contractual agreement, manuscripts, performance programs and ticket, correspondence, genealogy, a thesis “The Capital of the World” by Jim Monahan, ISNU 1958-59

Box and Folder Inventory

Folder 1: Artony Company

- 1.1.1 6 p. copy of an agreement between Ringling Bros. – Barnum & Bailey and the Artony Co. (Arthur Concello, Grace Killian, and Antoinette Concello) concerning a portable automatic grandstand device, 1948
- 1.1.2 Book mark with a sketch of Art and Antoinette Concello by Gossard, 1989

Folder 2: Circus Companies

- 1.2.1 Program, Sells-Floto Circus 1925
- 1.2.2 Program, Polack Bros. Circus 1950 – Bloomington Shrine Club First Annual Circus
- 1.2.3 Correspondence, August 9—October 23, 1969 (13 p.) between John C. Kunzog of Jamestown, N.Y. and Vern C. Gray, curator, McLean County Historical Society, concerning research on an altercation between Forepaugh’s Circus and P.T. Barnum’s, in 1881. Includes 2 photocopies of 1881 newspaper articles.
- 1.2.4 Preview booklet hawing a book: Russell Bros. Circus, 2018. Cover reads “official program season of 1942” Content is an article on how Art Concello acquired Russell Bros. Circus.

Folder 3: Circus Performers – Magazine and Journal Articles

- 1.3.1 Photocopy of p.561 from “History of McLean County, Illinois, 1879” concerning Major Houghton, resident of Gridley, who travelled with a Lillipution troupe.
- 1.3.2 “Kicking sawdust” by Gary Schoepfel, January 1979, Bloomington Normal Magazine, pp. 25-26.
- 1.3.3 “Continuing our ‘Great memorialites’ series” in *Contact with employees and friends of Memorial Hospital*, 21(7), July 1979.

- 1.3.4 "Gene and Mary Enos" by Steve Gossard, *Bandwagon*, September-October 1987, p.15-21 (photocopy).
- 1.3.5 "The flying return acts of Bert Doss and Harold Voise: The Flying Thrillers" by Steve Gossard, *Bandwagon*, July-August 1989, p.16-25 (photocopy).
- 1.3.6 "Life in a circus town: Walt Graybeal's Bloomington" by Steve Gossard, *Bandwagon*, November-December 1989, p.35-41 (photocopy).
- 1.3.7 Draft of the two *Gleanings* contributions, (25 p.), n.d.
- 1.3.8 "The Circus History of Bloomington, Illinois." Bibliography of Steve Gossard articles in *Bandwagon* and other publications, 1987-2012.

Folder 4: Circus Performers – Manuscripts

- 1.4.1 "The Greatest Little Show on Earth; the YMCA Circus of Bloomington, Illinois," by Steve Gossard, 1997 (unpaged).
- 1.4.2 "Circus Lore", by Betty Holzhauer, November 18, 1965 (10 p.)
- 1.4.3 Big top in the sky" by Ed. Raycraft (7 p.), n.d.
- 1.4.4 Bloomington Circus Folk, list of top stars, n.d.
- 1.4.5 Flying Wards list, handwritten, author unknown, n.d.
- 1.4.6 Notes on personalities written by Sam Stern (1 p. and envelope, handwritten), n.d.
- 1.4.7 "Walt Graybeal's Bloomington: Life in a circus town" by Steve Gossard, n.d., 28 pgs. of text plus loose photocopies of photographs
- 1.4.8 "Illinois Circus Genealogy Lists," compiled by Steve Gossard, n.d., 54 pgs.

Folder 5: Clyde V. Noble Manuscripts

- 1.5.1 Bloomington, Illinois the home of "The man on the flying trapeze" by Clyde V. Noble, (4 p.), n.d.
- 1.5.2 Bloomington, Illinois the home of "The man on the flying trapeze" by Clyde V. Noble, (11 p.), n.d.
- 1.5.3 Bloomington, Illinois the home of "The daring young man on the flying trapeze" by Clyde V. Noble, (3 p.), 1951.

Folder 6: Robert E. Handley Manuscripts

- 1.6.1 Famous Bloomington Circus Troupes, compiled by Robert E. Handley, 1969 (5 p.).
- 1.6.2 Letter from Handley to Illinois State University Photographic Service thanking for photos of Handley in Homecoming Parade, November 26, 1969. On Ringling Bros Barnum Bailey letterhead with envelope.
- 1.6.3 Letterhead and Famous Bloomington Circus Troupes and Honor Role, compiled by Robert E. Handley, August 31, 1969. (2)
- 1.6.4 Honor Role Bloomington Circus Folk, (by Harold Ramage), revised February 13 1980. This list notes that it is a compilation of Robert Handley's list and a list from 1951 displayed for Circus Week at Wither Public Library, May 1951.
- 1.6.5 What appears to be original "Honor Roll – Bloomington Circus Folk" and "Famous Bloomington Circus Troupes" list with handwritten notations. n.d.
- 1.6.6 Famous Bloomington Illinois Circus Troupes and Honor Roll of Bloomington Illinois Circus Folk, compiled and updated by Robert E. Handley, 2011 (6 p.)

Folder 7: Circus Performers – Newspaper Clippings

- 1.7.1 “Gridley character dead”, obituary for Samuel Edgar Houghton, from *The Pantagraph*, April 4, 1904 (photocopy).
- 1.7.2 “Remarkable character – Samuel Edgar Houghton” obituary from an unknown newspaper, 1904 (photocopy).
- 1.7.3 Various clippings from *The Pantagraph*, 1928-1986 (3 p. photocopied).
- 1.7.4 “Bloomington flyer factory” by William J. Conway, *The Pantagraph*, February 5, 1950 (photocopy).
- 1.7.5 “On to the ‘big’ top”, *The Pantagraph*, July 22, 2001; “Mrs. Noble, long in show business, dies”, *The Pantagraph*, March 5, 1963 (photocopy).
- 1.7.6 “Ex-Bloomingtonians hold top jobs with big circus” by Bob Simpson, *The Pantagraph*, September 26, 1968, (photocopy).
- 1.7.7 “Circus buffs enjoy tour of Twin Cities” by John Bryan, *The Pantagraph*, February 23, 1969 (photocopy).
- 1.7.8 “Circus aerialist ‘Bert’ Doss dies”, *The Pantagraph*, February 5, 1970; “Circus veteran dies”, *The Pantagraph*, December 20, 1965 (photocopy).
- 1.7.9 “Despite tragedies, Wallendas continue”, by Margo Doble, *The Pantagraph*, September 29, 1972 (photocopy).
- 1.7.10 “Circus aerialist Musselman dies” *The Pantagraph*, December 21, 1962; “Robert Musselman” *The Pantagraph*, 1972 (photocopy).
- 1.7.11 “Retired aerialist Harry LaMar, native of Bloomington, dies”, *The Pantagraph*, January 24, 1972 (photocopy).
- 1.7.12 “Mayme Ward dies at 78; famed on flying trapeze”, *The Pantagraph*, January 10, 1973 (photocopy).
- 1.7.13 “Interest in circus brings photo publication” by Sandy Spencer, *The Pantagraph*, March 10, 1974.
- 1.7.14 “Circus people to gather once again in B-N” by Kathy McKinney, *The Pantagraph*, July 29, 1979 (photocopy).
- 1.7.15 “Big top size” photograph in *The Pantagraph*, July 29, 1979 (photocopy).
- 1.7.16 “The days of cotton candy and toy balloons” Young’s yarns, by Fred Young, *The Pantagraph*, n.d.
- 1.7.17 “World capital for aerialists”, *The Pantagraph*, 100th Anniversary Edition, (photocopy), n.d.

Folder 8: Gamma Phi Circus

- 1.8.1 Gamma Phi 50th Anniversary 1979 program
- 1.8.2 Gamma Phi Circus 1986 50th edition program
- 1.8.3 “A Central Illinois institution: Gamma Phi Circus” by Marc Lebovitz, *Illinois Magazine* 25(2), March-April 1986, p.1-4.
- 1.8.4 “Students of the circus” by Dan Craft, *The Pantagraph*, April 19, 1996.
- 1.8.5 “Gamma Phi Circus has a long history” by Suzanne Broderick, *Twin City Community News*, April 2, 2003.
- 1.8.6 “Lord of the ring” by Steve Arney, *The Pantagraph*, April 8, 2003.
- 1.8.7 Illinois State University Gamma Phi Circus note card, 2004.
- 1.8.8 Gamma Phi Circus donation solicitation card, n.d.
- 1.8.9 Flier, for April 2016 performances.
- 1.8.10 Fliers for 22nd Annual Summer Camp, 2016.
- 1.8.11 “Circus Thrives and Inspires Lives,” *50 Plus News & View*, July 2016, pp. 4-5.

Folder 9: Miscellaneous

- 1.9.1 “Big top at Milner: ISNU collection preserves Twin Cities’ tie with circus” by Dave Haake, *Daily Pantagraph*, August 25, 1959 (photocopy).
- 1.9.2 “With the greatest of ease . . . Bloomington’s artists of the trapeze” 2 copies of a flyer advertising an exhibit at the Old Courthouse Museum, July 8-October 15, 1994
- 1.9.3 “The Ringling-Barnum Circus in color from 1941 to 1956: the Braathen Kodachromes in Milner Library’s special collections at Illinois State University” by Bill McMillin, *Bandwagon* 54(5), September-October 2010, p. 1-18.
- 1.9.4 1 ticket for entrance to the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, Wendling Show Grounds, n.d.
- 1.9.5 Pictures of circus barns, Bloomington, used in the 1870’s (exterior view and interior view), n.d.
- 1.9.6 Check to Moeller & Thuerer from Ringling Bros, May 2, 1891.
- 1.9.7 Grouping of copies of photos and newspaper articles about aerial performer Milo Linwood Jones, his partner & sister-in-law Joan Brown, aerial act the Three Milo’s, etc., accompanying email from Milo’s daughter Robin Holt in Aug 2016. Mostly undated.
- 1.9.8 Free Ticket for child, Garden Bros. Circus, May 22, 2017. 2 copies.

Folder 10: Stern Correspondence

- 1.10.1 Correspondence from C.A. “Red” Sonnenberg to Sam Stern, August 24, 1968.
- 1.10.2 Correspondence from George, March 6, 1979.
- 1.10.3 Correspondence from Tom Parkinson to Sam Stern, June 17, 1979.
- 1.10.4 Correspondence from Willie Krause to Sam Stern, June 24, 1979, includes newspaper clipping.
- 1.10.5 Correspondence from Tom Parkinson to Sam Stern, July 13, 1979.
- 1.10.6 Correspondence from Sam Stern to Willie and Jeannie Krause, July 18, 1979.
- 1.10.7 Correspondence from Sam Stern to Art & Maggie Brown, July 19, 1979.
- 1.10.8 Correspondence from Sam Stearn to Tuffy Genders, July 20, 1979.
- 1.10.9 Correspondence from Tuffy Genders to Sam Stern July 26, 1979.
- 1.10.10 Correspondence from Willie & Jeannie Krause to Sam Stern, August 1, 1979.
- 1.10.11 1979 Convention Circus Historical Society program, August 2-4, 1979
- 1.10.12 “The Flying Concellos” announcement of 1979 Circus Historical Society convention
- 1.10.13 “Flying Wards” announcement of 1979 Circus Historical Society convention.
- 1.10.14 Circus Historical Society convention name tag for Sam Stern, August 3, 1979
- 1.10.15 Correspondence from Merle Evans to Ed ?, August 15th, 1979 (?).
- 1.10.16 Correspondence from Tom Parkinson to Sam Stern, n.d.

Folder 11: Valentine Family

- 1.11.1 “The Valentine family of flyers: A tribute to Lorraine Valentine” by Steve Gossard and Cherie Valentine, *Bandwagon*, November-December 1987
- 1.11.2 “The Flying Valentinos of Bloomington, Illinois” by Cherie Valentine, *Back Yard*, 3(57), December 15, 1998.
- 1.11.3 email about history of Valentine family as performers, their practice barn, etc., 19 August 2016.

Folder 12: Ward Family

- 1.12.1 Photocopy of advertisement for The Flying Wards at Oconto County Fair, September 4,5,6,7, 1906
- 1.12.2 “Only the daring work for him: A single slip means death to Eddie Ward’s pupils” by Earl Chapin May, *Popular Science Monthly*, May 1926 (photocopy)
- 1.12.3 “Wards new trained mule act is ready” *Pantagraph*, May 29, 1926 (photocopy)
- 1.12.4 “Eddie Ward, supreme aerialist, braves dangers of trade for fun there’s in it” *Daily Pantagraph*, November 21, 1926 (photocopy)
- 1.12.5 “Grab it!” by Earl Chapin May, *American Magazine*, July, 1928
- 1.12.6 “Eddie Ward, gymnast, dies” and “Death of Eddie Ward leaves city without ‘aerial king’”, unknown newspaper, May 1929 (photocopy)
- 1.12.7 “Elza Ward, 70, trapeze group member, dies” *Daily Pantagraph*, December 22, 1964 (photocopy)
- 1.12.8 “Mrs. Ward on job: Turns out 203 costumes for big circus parade” *Pantagraph*, June 28, 1968 (photocopy)
- 1.12.9 “Notes on the Flying Wards” on Circus World Museum letterhead, March 30, 1970 (photocopy)
- 1.12.10 “Mayme Ward” by J.D. Draper, *Bandwagon*, January-February, 1973 (photocopy)
- 1.12.11 “Flying Wards” *Pantagraph*, July 29, 1979 (photocopy)
- 1.12.12 Correspondence from Pamela Ward to the Bloomington-Normal Genealogical Society requesting information on the Funk/Ward families, December 31, 1980
- 1.12.13 “Flying Wards: The greatest aerial flying return act in the world” by Steve Gossard, *Bandwagon*, November-December 1986
- 1.12.14 “Flying Wards: The greatest aerial flying return act in the world” by Steve Gossard, *Bandwagon*, November-December 1986 (photocopy)
- 1.12.15 Bookmark with drawing of Eddie and Jennie Ward by Gossard, 1991
- 1.12.16 “Mayme Ward enshrined in Circus Hall of Fame”, unknown newspaper, n.d.
- 1.12.17 Photocopy of advertisement of Flying Wards, n.d.
- 1.12.18 Page 6 of a manuscript by a Noble, n.d. (photocopy)
- 1.12.19 Page 4 and 5 of a manuscript by Mrs. Stanley Holzhauser, n.d. (photocopy)
- 1.12.20 “Excerpt from a letter sent by Blanche Ward of Liberal Kansas”, n.d. (photocopy)
- 1.12.21 2 pages of genealogy of starting with Wycliffe Ward, father of Levi Ward (1830-1859), on the letterhead of Pamela C. Ward, n.d.
- 1.12.22 “Local top-notchers start for circus”, unknown newspaper, n.d. (photocopy)
- 1.12.23 “Welcome to the Grand Hotel” original property of the Wards, includes a short history by S. Gossard and the hotel menu, n.d., 4 p. (photocopy)

Folder 13: Pantagraph Photo Prints I

Includes prints from original photographs held in the Pantagraph Print Collection: Wards

Folder 14: Pantagraph Photo Prints II

Includes prints from original photographs held in the Pantagraph Print Collection: Concellos, Billettis, General, Corderos, Flying Aces, Fisher’s, Flemings, Flying Thrillers, and La Mars.

Folder 15: Bandwagon

- 1.15.1 Vol. 60 No 4. 2016 issue on Bloomington circus history: “The Greatest Little Show on Earth The YMCA of Bloomington, Illinois,” Steve

Gossard, p 6-26.

“Arms Race in Lace Erma Ward, Lillian Leitzel and the One Arm Plange,” Mark Schmitt, pp 28-34.

The China Durban family of Bloomington, Illinois,” Dorita Estes, pp 36-41.

Map of Bloomington, Illinois, p. 44

“The Valentine family of Flyers of Bloomington, Illinois,” Cherie Valentine, pp. 46-71.

“One of our own: Pawnee Bill’s life as viewed by Bloomington residents,” Eric Willey, pp. 72-90.

Folder 16: “The Capital of the World” Master’s Degree Thesis

1.16.1 Master’s Degree thesis by Jim Monahan, ISNU, 1958-59. 18 pp.