

Collection #
M 1346
CT 2544-2557

**JOHN HANNERS
CIRCUS RESEARCH COLLECTION, 1937-1980**

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 2 manuscript boxes, 1 box of audio cassettes

COLLECTION DATES: 1937-1980

PROVENANCE: Matt Holdzkom, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2018

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2017.0411

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICALSKETCHES

John Hanners (1945-2014)

John Hanners was born September 28, 1945 in the village of Piccots End, England. His father Deon Hanners was a serviceman in the U.S. Air Force and his mother, Ruth Ambrose Hanners, worked in a local hospital. The young family soon moved to Deon's hometown of Casey, Illinois. After graduating from Casey High School, John Hanners himself served in the Air Force before attending Eastern Illinois University (B.S. in Education), Indiana State University (M.A.), and finally Michigan State University (Ph.D.).

From 1979 to 1992 Hanners taught at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, where he was eventually named chair of the Department of Communication Arts. It was during his time at Allegheny that he and his colleague Nels Juleus commenced a collection of oral history interviews related to the circus. In the summer of 1980, the two professors visited Peru, Indiana in order to interview local residents who had themselves, or whose close relatives had worked on the circuses that had once wintered there.

At about the same time, Hanners contacted Dr. Donald R. Cressey--then at the University of California Santa Barbara--about an unpublished autobiography of a circus grifter in the papers of Cressey's mentor, Edwin H. Sutherland. Cressey responded by sending a copy of that and much more circus-related material from Sutherland's papers in support of the project.

In 1992, Hanners was named professor and Head of the Department of Mass Media at East Texas State University (now Texas A&M University-Commerce). In 1993, his book was published, titled *'It Was Play or Starve': Acting in the Nineteenth Century American Popular Theatre*. Hanners used material from his Circus Oral History project and the Sutherland papers for a chapter in the book about circus grift.

Hanners also authored 15 scholarly articles and numerous plays. While at Commerce, 10 of his plays were produced by the University Playhouse, and he also directed fifteen theatrical productions.

John Hanners died on May 18, 2014.

Sources:

"John Hanners, 1945-2014" *obituaries.commercejournal.com* Published May 27, 2014.
<http://obituaries.commercejournal.com/obituary/john-hanners-1945-2014-742603172>.

Materials in the collection.

Edwin H. Sutherland (1883-1950)

Noted criminologist Edwin H. Sutherland grew up near Grand Island, Nebraska, the son of a college president. He received his B.A. from Grand Island College, a Baptist Seminary, in 1904. After a brief stint teaching at Sioux Falls College in South Dakota, he enrolled in the University of Chicago, initially as a School of Divinity student. In 1913, seven years after entering the school, Sutherland emerged with a Ph.D. in Sociology and Political Economy.

It wasn't until 1921, as a professor at the University of Illinois, that Sutherland approached the subject of criminology. His department head asked all new faculty members to take on a major project, and suggested Sutherland pen a textbook on the subject. By the time the first edition of *Principles of Criminology* was published in 1924, Sutherland was 41 years old. At that time, the study of crime and criminals focused mainly on inherited traits rather than social systems.

A decade later while Sutherland was teaching at Indiana University, a fellow criminologist noticed that Sutherland had unwittingly proposed a bold new theory of criminology in his most recent edition of *Principles*. This theory would become known as "differential association," and as Richard A. Wright put it, "turned accepted wisdom on its head and transformed [the] discipline." Sutherland further solidified his legacy in 1939, giving a speech titled "The White Collar Criminal." Sutherland was the first in the field to challenge the belief that aristocrats could not be criminals. Thus the phrase "white collar crime" was coined.

In 1937, Sutherland's book *The Professional Thief* was published. About that time he was contacted by a man named Glenn H. Wakefield who claimed to have been a professional grifter on and off circuses for over forty years. Wakefield was interested in writing about his experiences. For a period of about two years, Sutherland maintained contact with Wakefield, collecting information about underworld society through correspondence and casual interviews, and all the while keeping typed notes of the interactions.

Upon Sutherland's death in 1950, the Wakefield material was among that culled by his wife and retained by Sutherland's student and collaborator, Dr. Donald R. Cressey.

Sources:

Friedrichs, David O., Isabel Schoultz, and Aleksandra Jordanoska. *Edwin H. Sutherland*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017.

Wright, Richard A. and Miller, J. Mitchell, eds. *Encyclopedia of Criminology*. "Edwin H. Sutherland." Routledge, 2005.

"Edwin Sutherland" *en.wikipedia.org* Last edited November 4, 2017.

Materials in the collection.

Glenn H. Wakefield (1875-1952)

Glenn Wakefield was born near Council Bluffs, Iowa in 1875. The economic depression of the 1890s forced him to leave home to find work. At the age of seventeen he went to Chicago and found work selling newspapers at a railway station. Struggling to make ends meet, he soon met Jerry Mugivan, who showed him the art of shortchanging to “make” extra money on the side. Mugivan himself had started as a newsboy at the depot in his hometown of Terre Haute, Indiana. Soon Wakefield secured a job on the trains, where this scheme could be more efficiently and safely executed. Shortly thereafter, Mugivan took Wakefield under his wing and taught him various other grifting methods around the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

Wakefield’s career as a professional criminal seems to have taken off from there, and for years he floated around the country, wherever his schemes led him. However, years of this lifestyle apparently wore on his conscience. He claimed to have suffered a mental breakdown in Logansport, Indiana, sometime in the mid-1930s. By the time he contacted Sutherland, he felt he was too old to steal, but made a little money playing cards and writing for columns like “Believe It Or Not!”

Based on material in the collection, Wakefield’s contact with Sutherland seems to have ended abruptly in 1939. Records indicate that Wakefield had been a resident of a facility run by the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks in Bedford, Virginia since 1931. He died at this Elks Home in 1952.

Sources:

Materials in the collection.

Ancestry.com. *Virginia, Death Records, 1912-2014* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is made up of materials collected by John Hanners, who initially intended to create a bank of oral histories related to the circus in the United States prior to World War II. Hanners came to circus scholarship through his interest in theatre and saw the circus as a largely untapped field of study. He soon became interested in circus grift in the 20th century--an aspect of circus history which had been ignored nearly to the point of outright denial.

According to Sutherland's *Principles of Criminology* (4th edition), circus grifting "consists principally in sure-thing gambling, as seen in the shell-game, three-card monte, the eight-dice cloth, the cologne joint, and the spindle" [226]. Hanners found that some circuses, notably those from Peru, Indiana, not only harbored grifters during the early 20th century, but were owned and managed by ex-grifters. Thus Hanners set out to learn as much about this aspect as he could.

The collection is divided into two series. **Series 1** consists of oral histories conducted by Hanners and his colleague Nels Juleus during a research trip to Peru in the summer of 1980. The only exceptions to this are previously recorded lectures by Art Johns, wagon painter, a talk by his wife Grace, who worked in wardrobe, and an interview with Bobby Baxter, a clown working fairs in Conneaut Lake Park, Pennsylvania. Most interviews have been transcribed.

The interviews cover a wide range of topics about circus life from the perspective of individuals who were employed by the circus. The interview subjects are for the most part ex-performers. Only in a few cases do the interviews move into a discussion about grift.

Additionally, some of the subjects were interviewed previously by Tom Parkinson. Hanners and Juleus obtained tapes of these interviews through the Peru Public Library and partially transcribed them. In these cases, the transcription is included in the collection but not the audio cassettes.

Also included in Series 1 are drafts of Hanners' articles about grift. Of particular interest, a draft of his 1982 piece "The Dark Side of the Circus" for Allegheny Magazine includes a peer review from Robert L. Parkinson, Research Center Director of the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Parkinson disagreed with much of the piece, which perhaps indicates the uniqueness of the Wakefield material. Hanners' response is also included.

Also included are programs produced by the Circus City Festival in Peru for the annual amateur circus there, and the July/August 1964 issue of *Bandwagon*, the journal of the Circus Historical Society, which consists entirely of Peru-related articles.

Series 2 consists of the typed notes of Edwin Sutherland's correspondence with ex-grifter Glenn Wakefield. Highlights include biographical information about Wakefield, typed copies of Wakefield's letters, Wakefield's descriptions of various grifting schemes, and short biographical sketches of other grifters with whom Wakefield was associated.

Whether due to Wakefield's memory or that Sutherland sent him small payments for information, much of the material is duplicated within the collection. Additionally, Wakefield's spelling of names is often incorrect [for example, early in the correspondence he frequently spells Mugivan "McGivan" or something similar]. However, many of the names, dates, and facts provided by Wakefield have been verified by the processor through newspaper databases.

Series 2 also includes essays about grift evidently composed by Wakefield, and the article "Circus Grift" by Sutherland.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Hanners Materials

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Robert “Bobby” Baxter (clown) press release and clipping	Box 1, Folder 3
Dortha Carter (ballet girl) interview transcript	Box 1, Folder 4
Joyce Ferguson (daughter of Clyde Beatty) interview transcript	Box 1, Folder 5
Karl Hartisch (clown and friend of American Circus Corporation secretary Harry Sarig) interview transcript	Box 1, Folder 6
Tom & Betty Hodgini (bareback riders and trainers) interview transcript	Box 1, Folder 7
Art Johns (wagon painter) lecture transcript	Box 1, Folder 8
Grace Johns (wardrobe) interview transcript	Box 1, Folder 9
John C. Kunzog (press agent) interview transcript	Box 1, Folder 10
Joe Kury (sword swallower) interview transcript	Box 1, Folder 11
Ralph E. Swisher (aerialist) interview transcript	Box 1, Folder 12
W. W. Wilno (human cannonball) interview transcript	Box 1, Folder 13
Robert “Bobby” DeLochte (treasurer) interview transcript [This interview conducted by Tom Parkinson and obtained from the Peru Public Library in 1980]	Box 1, Folder 14
Eva Mae Lewis (aerialist) interview transcript [This interview conducted by Tom Parkinson and obtained from the Peru Public Library in 1980]	Box 1, Folder 15
James & Polly McLeod correspondence [not interviewed]	Box 1, Folder 16

Blank oral history release forms	Box 1, Folder 17
“The Dark Side of the American Circus” by John Hanners, with peer review by Robert Parkinson and Hanners’ reply.	Box 1, Folder 18
“It Was Play or Starve” gift chapter draft, partial source materials and bibliography draft	Box 1, Folder 19
<i>Bandwagon</i> magazine, Jul./Aug. 1964, “80 Years of Circus in Peru”	Box 2, Folder 16
Peru Amateur Circus Festival programs; 1965, 1973, 1974, 1976	Box 2, Folder 17
Bobby Baxter interview, CT 2544; CT 2545	Box 3
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Joyce Ferguson interview, CT 2547	Box 3
Karl Hartisch interview, CT 2548; CT2549; CT2550	Box 3
Tom and Betty Hodgini interview, CT 2551; CT 2552	Box 3
Art Johns lecture, CT 2553	Box 3
John C. Kunzog interview, CT 2554	Box 3
Joe Kury interview, CT 2555	Box 3
Ralph E. Swisher interview, CT 2556	Box 3
W. W. Wilno interview, CT 2557	Box 3

Series 2: Sutherland Materials

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Glenn H. Wakefield autobiography, dictation taken by Sutherland	Box 2, Folder 1
Impressions of Wakefield (description)	Box 2, Folder 2
Wakefield letters & manuscript 1 of 3	Box 2, Folder 3
Wakefield letters & manuscript 2 of 3	Box 2, Folder 4

Wakefield letters & manuscript 3 of 3	Box 2, Folder 5
Grifter bios A-H	Box 2, Folder 6
Grifter bios I-Z	Box 2, Folder 7
“Circus Grift by an Old Circus Grifter” by Wakefield	Box 2, Folder 8
Society for Social Research <i>Bulletin</i> , Dec. 1939	Box 2, Folder 9
“Circus Grift” by Edwin Sutherland	Box 2, Folder 10
Grift essays by Glenn Wakefield	Box 2, Folder 11
Kinds of grift	Box 2, Folder 12
Grifter argot	Box 2, Folder 13
Training for grift	Box 2, Folder 14
“How to Become a Professional Yegg [safecracker]” and other topics	Box 2, Folder 15

