

Collection #  
M 1512  
OM 0769

**INDIANA CIRCUSES  
COLLECTION, CA. 1901-1961**

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## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 half-sized manuscript box, 1 half-sized photograph box, 1 oversized folder, 1 printed item
COLLECTION DATES:	Circa 1901-1961
PROVENANCE:	Various
RESTRICTIONS:	None
COPYRIGHT:	
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
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. 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 late 1906 Wallace successfully purchased the equipment and name 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, established in 1892 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 Ten Big Shows. Ballard 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, and Howe's Great London, the trio added titles to their holdings like Sells-Floto, Al G. Barnes, Gollmar Bros., and more. This required extensive additions to the Peru winter quarters, which were used in combination with other properties nationwide, including Ballard's farm in West Baden, Indiana. By 1929, the trio's combined circus holdings dwarfed those of the enormous 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. This put every major American circus in Ringling's 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 competitor circus called Cole Bros. The 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 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.

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: Great Wallace Shows**

#### CONTENTS

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

#### CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 1

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

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 1

### **Series 2: Hagenbeck-Wallace**

#### CONTENTS

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

#### CONTAINER

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 2

Dining Tent, Hagenbeck-Wallace [interior]

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 8

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

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 3

“[John Helliott?] Wrestling a Polar Bear” circa 1910

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 3

The Carl Hagenbeck and Great Wallace Shows Combined Official Review and Magazine of Zoology, 1912

Box 1, Folder 2

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

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

Knecht, Klara E., *The Circus*, 1934

General Collection:  
GV 1821 .H3 K55

### **Series 3: John Robinson's Circus**

#### CONTENTS

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

#### CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 5

### **Series 4: Howe's Great London Circus**

#### CONTENTS

[Bandwagon with three arches pulled by two horses]

#### CONTAINER

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

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 6

**Series 6: Misc.**

CONTENTS

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

CONTAINER

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Folder 1 of 1

Benjamin E. Wallace, circa 1920

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 5

American Circus Corporation color letterhead, circa 1929

Box 1, Folder 7

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

Box 1, Folder 8

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

Box 1, Folder 9



**Series 7: Peru Amateur Circus**

CONTENTS

Annual Festival Program, Sept. 1961

CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 10