

Circus Collection:

A Preliminary Inventory of the Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Harry Ransom Center
Title:	Circus Collection
Dates:	circa 1775-1988 (bulk circa 1850-1940)
Extent:	37 document boxes, 8 oversize boxes, 27 flat file drawers, 1 lateral file cabinet drawer, 2 framed items (circa 29 linear feet)
Abstract:	The Circus Collection consists of materials assembled from other Performing Arts collections. It is divided into six series: I. American Circuses, II. Foreign Circuses, III. P. T. Barnum, IV. Dime Museums, V. Wild West Productions, and VI. Posters and Playbills. The bulk of the collection dates from the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.
Call Number:	Performing Arts Collection PA-00016
Language:	English
Note:	This brief collection description is a preliminary inventory. The collection is not fully processed or cataloged; no descriptions of series or indexes are available in this inventory.
Access:	Open for research. Selected digital images from this collection are available on the Harry Ransom Center Digital Collections website.

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Assembled by Performing Arts staff from the Davis-Kendall Collection and others
Processed by:	Erin Lawrimore, 2002; Helen Adair, 2009; Helen Baer, 2012
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Scope and Contents

The Circus Collection consists of materials assembled from other Performing Arts collections. It is divided into six series: I. American Circuses, II. Foreign Circuses, III. P. T. Barnum, IV. Dime Museums, V. Wild West Productions, and VI. Posters and Playbills. The bulk of the collection dates from the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

The American Circuses series contains materials related to individual circuses as well as the performers and administrators associated with them. This series consists of newspaper clippings, photographs, posters, programs, and musical scores, with the bulk of the material dating from the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century. Included in the American Circuses series is documentation of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, the Ringling Brothers Circus, John Robinson's Circus, and the Sells Floto Circus.

The Foreign Circuses series also contains clippings, photographs, posters, and programs, as well as numerous scrapbook pages. The majority of the material in this series covers British circuses and dates from the late 1800s.

The third series pertains to the showman P. T. Barnum (1810-1891) and contains photographs, posters, programs, and scrapbook pages related to Barnum's Circus and Museum and the performers who worked for and toured with him, both in Europe and in the United States. General Tom Thumb and Siamese twins Chang and Eng are especially well documented.

The Dime Museum series consists of cabinet cards of various Dime Museum and circus and carnival sideshow performers. Many of the performers depicted are not individually identified on the cabinet cards, but the cards are divided by type of act.

The fifth series contains newspaper clippings, photographs, programs, and scores documenting the Wild West productions of the late 1800s. The bulk of the material is related to Buffalo Bill Cody (1846-1917) and his Wild West Show. Other individuals featured in the series include Annie Oakley, Ned Buntline, Calamity Jane, and Wild Bill Hickock.

Posters and playbills make up the final series, which is divided into four subseries: A. American Circuses, B. Foreign Circuses, C. Wild West Shows and Rodeos, and D. Circus Performers. The bulk of this series consists of posters for American circuses such as the P. T. Barnum Circus and Museum, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Adam Forepaugh Circuses, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey, and the Sells-Floto Circus, among others. Most of the foreign circus material pertains to performances in England.

The materials in the Circus Collection were gathered together by Performing Arts staff, with the majority of the material assembled from the Davis-Kendall Collection.

Related Material

Related material may be found in the W. H. Crain Barnum & Bailey Circus Collection and the Joe E. Ward Circus Collection

Separated Material

One miniature book on General Tom Thumb was removed from Series III. P. T. Barnum; Barnum's Performers and placed in the Ransom Center's Miniature Book Storage

Series I. American Circuses

Individual Circuses

W. W. Cole's Circus	Container 1
Adam Forepaugh's Circus	
Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus	Container 1, 42
New York circuses	Container 2
Rice Brothers Circus	
Ringling Brothers Circus	Container 2, 41
John Robinson Circus	Container 2
Sells Floto Circus	
Small circuses	Container 3, 41

Performers

Aerialists	Container 4
Animal acts	Container 5, 43
Balancing acts	Container 6
Cats	
Clowns	Container 6, 41
Contortionists	Container 7
Elephants	
Equestrian acts	Container 7, 43
Gymnasts	Container 8-9, 43
Midgets	Container 10
Tightrope walkers	
Sideshow acts	Container 11-12, 41

Circus administrators, cabinet cards	Container 13
Circus-related music	Container 14
Circus wagons	
Programs	
Miscellaneous	Container 14, 41-42
Oversize materials	Container 35, 41-42

Series II. Foreign Circuses

Individual circuses	Container 15
Circus administrators and individual performers	
Performers with a troupe	
Acrobats	Container 16
Animal acts	
Cats	
Clowns	
Dogs	
Elephants	
Equestrian acts	Container 17, 41
Sideshowes	Container 18, 41
Magazines and clippings	Container 19, 42
Programs	Container 20, 44
Miscellaneous	
Events	Container 21
Music	
Obituaries	Container 21, 41
Theatres	Container 21
Oversize materials	Container 36-39

Series III. P. T. Barnum

Photographs	Container 22, 42
Newspaper clippings	Container 22, 41, 44
Scrapbook pages	Container 22, 44
Programs	Container 23-24
Barnum's performers	Container 25, 41, 44-45
Oversize materials	Container 39
Barnum's American Museum, composite grouping of 42 cabinet cards and one print, ca. 1865-ca. 1900 (58 1/2 x 34 1/2 inches)	Container framed item 1

Series IV. Dime Museums

Sideshow acts, cabinet cards

Amputees/armless/legless

Container 26

Animals

"Blue Man"

Circassian

Deformed

Dwarfs

Container 26-27

Fats

Container 27

Giants

Long Hair

Container 28

Nationalities

Oddities

Snake Charmers

Tattoos

Other performers, cabinet cards

Aerialists

Container 29

Animal Acts

Bicyclists

Clowns

Contortionists

Fire Eaters

Knife Throwers

Living Statues

Strongmen

Sword swallowers

Tight rope walkers

Miscellaneous

Series V. Wild West Productions

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show

Buffalo Bill, photographs and clippings	Container 30-31
Performers	Container 32
Programs	Container 33
Scores	
Performers from other Wild West shows	Container 34
Oversize materials	Container 40

Series VI. Posters and Playbills

Subseries A. American Circuses

Al G. Barnes and Sells-Floto Combined Circus	Container lateral file 1
P. T. Barnum	
Playbills	Container lateral files 2-4
Posters	Container drawer 1
Barnum & Bailey	Container drawers 2-5
Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson	Container drawer 6
Clyde Beatty Circus / Clyde Bros. Circus / Cole Bros. / Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Combined Circus	
Circus Vargas	
Dutton Circus	
Adam Forepaugh	Container drawer 7
Adam Forepaugh and Sells Brothers	
Great North American Circus and Hippodrome	Container lateral file 5
Haag's Railroad Show	Container lateral file 6
Hagen Bros.	Container drawer 7
Hagenbeck	
Hagenbeck-Wallace	Container drawers 7-9
Hagenbeck-Wallace and 4 Paw Sells Bros.	Container drawer 9
H. P. Madigan & Co.	Container lateral file 7
Manley's Great Triple Alliance	Container lateral file 8
Tom Mix Circus	Container drawer 9

Myers' Great American Circus and Hippodrome

New York Circus

Container lateral file 9

Dan Rice Circus

Playbills

Container lateral file 10

Posters

Container drawer 10

Ringling Bros.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey

Panoramic photograph of troupe in Cleveland, Ohio, 1920 (10 1/2 x 35 1/4 inches)

Container
framed
item 2

Playbills

Container lateral files
11-15

Posters

Container drawers 10-14

Seils-Sterling Circus

Container drawer 14

Sells and Gray

Sells Brothers

Container drawers 14-15

Sells-Floto

Container drawers 15-17

Shrine Circus

Container drawer 17

Sparks Circus

Container lateral file 16

Van Amburgh & Co.'s Mammoth Menagerie

Container lateral
file 17

Whitby's Great Show and Circus

Container lateral file
18

Unidentified companies

Container drawer 17

Subseries B. Foreign circuses

England

Playbills

Container lateral files
19-29

Posters

Container drawers 18-20

Other countries

Container drawer 21

Subseries C. Wild West Shows and Rodeos

Buffalo Bill

Container drawers 22-23

JE Ranch Rodeo

Container drawer 24

Red Horse Ranch Rodeo

Tiger Bill's Wild West

Unidentified Wild West show

Subseries D. Circus Performers

Posters and playbills

Container drawers 25-27