

# ★ *Circus Facts and History* ★

- **1768** Philip Astley is the first person to bring together the elements of circus.
- **1793** John Bill Ricketts presents the first circus in America in Philadelphia on April 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- **1797** Philip Lailson sends his performers in costume out into the streets of Philadelphia hoping to drum up business for his circus - the first circus parade is born.
- **1810** Traveling animal menageries become popular, offering audiences rare glimpses at exotic beasts.
- **1825** J. Purdy Brown is the first to order a canvas tent for his circus. Brown realized he would have the ability to move his show every day with a tent and could therefore reach more people and make more money.
- **1829** Trained animal acts begin to appear with circuses.
- **1835** Circus wagons begin to appear in circus parades. The very first was a band wagon carrying the circus band.
- **1857** The steam calliope is a unique and loud addition to circus parades.
- **1872** P.T. Barnum, together with William C. Coup and Dan Castello, move their entire show in railroad cars. Small circuses are still traveling by wagon.
- **1882** Jumbo, the elephant, is brought to the United States by the Barnum and London Show. The word "jumbo" comes to be used as a synonym for large.
- **1883** William F. Cody, or Buffalo Bill, performs in the first wild west show at the Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition.
- **1884** Al, Otto, Alf, Charles and John Ringling give their first performance as Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows in Baraboo, Wisconsin.
- **1891** The Adam Forepaugh Circus features Miss Carlotta and Colonel Boone in the first wild animal act presented in an arena.
- **1891** Phineas T. Barnum dies on April 7<sup>th</sup>.
- **1892** Frank Menches, while selling food concessions, runs out of link sausages. He asks his assistants to form ground sausage into patties and sell them as sandwiches. The hamburger is born.
- **1896** Barnum & Bailey Circus exhibits a horseless carriage in their circus parade.

- **1907** The Ringlings purchase Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth.
- **1919** Ringling Bros. Circus and Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth are combined into one giant circus, The Big Show.
- **1924** Seils-Sterling circus takes to the road in motorized vehicles.
- **1929** The Great Depression begins and circuses are struggling - people have no money to use for entertainment.
- **1927** The Circus Fans Association of America is founded.
- **1941** Walt Disney Pictures releases "Dumbo". World War II makes it difficult for circuses to find young men to work. However the war gives industries a boost that provide Americans with the money to attend the circus more often. - business is booming.
- **1942** Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus donates a block of seats at each performance to war bond buyers.
- **1944** The Big Show performs a show on July 6<sup>th</sup>. During the show, the tent catches fire and within nine minutes collapses. Many are injured or killed in the fire. Six officials are sent to prison, large fines are paid and new fire codes for public places are put into place.
- **1956** The Big Show does its last tented show on July 16<sup>th</sup>. The show is performed exclusively in arenas after this date.
- **1968** Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey open Clown College.
- **1970** The first women are accepted to Clown College.
- **1974** Philippe Petit walks a tight wire strung between the twin towers of the World Trade Center, 1,350 feet above the side walk.
- **1977** The Big Apple Circus, a one-ring European style circus, is founded by Paul Binder.
- **1984** Cirque du Soleil is founded by Guy Laliberte.
- **1987** Rob Mermin founds Circus Smirkus.