

International Circus Hall of Fame & Museum Collections Project – July 2013, Peru, Indiana

The George Hubler Collection gets some museum-standard TLC

In July 2013 a collections organization team converged from distant points at the International Circus Hall of Fame & Museum in Peru, Indiana, to impose some museum-standard order and conservation practices to the newly-acquired George Hubler Collection.

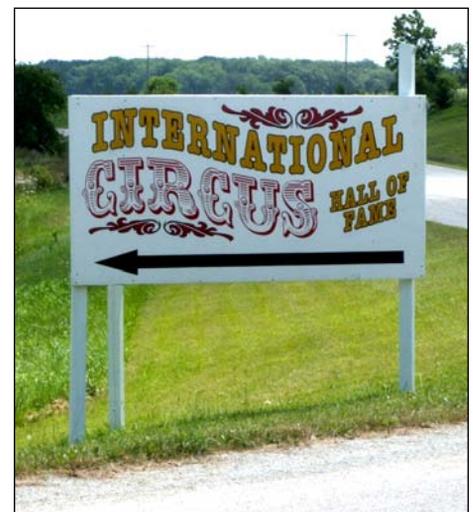
George Hubler (1922-2007) was a performer and longtime circus producer (George Hubler International 5-Ring Circus) based in Dayton, Ohio. His massive collection of business records, correspondence, memorabilia, circus programs, and promotional material from hundreds of circus performers was given to the museum by the Hubler family.

The project was directed by circus historian and former museum curator John Polacsek. He was assisted by R.W. Bacon (current museum professional and retired circus/variety performer),

Sarah Chapman (retired circus trapeze artist), Ray Gronso (circus memorabilia collector), and Matt Holdzkom (former youth circus performer and current graduate student in public history). The project was a museum/history outreach initiative of the Circus Historical Society.

The International Circus Hall of Fame & Museum, a National Historic Landmark since 1987, is located on the grounds and in the buildings of the former winter quarters of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus and the many traveling shows of its successor enterprise, the American Circus Corporation. The International Circus Hall of Fame was moved from Sarasota, Fla. to Peru, Indiana – known as “Circus City” – in 1991.

The photos on the following pages show the collections project; the museum grounds; selected museum exhibit cases and posters; acts in the Big Top Circus on the grounds; the beautifully restored circus wagons; and the adjacent homes owned in pre-circus days by the Godfroy family, the last chiefs of the Miami tribe.



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Collections Work



Above left is the collections team at work (minus this photographer, or course). At left (back to front), project manager **John Polacsek, Matt Holdzkom, and Sarah Chapman**. At right is **Ray Gronso**. The white archival banker's boxes hold the already-sorted materials. The trash barrel is included in the photo on purpose – to show the mass of discarded material that formerly held the unprocessed collection. **Above right, Sarah Chapman** comes to work through the museum exhibition gallery in the former winter quarters barn. Below right, **Ray Gronso** is in his element among circus ephemera. Below left, the collections team leaves no paper unturned.



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The Grounds



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The Grounds



Above is an effort to capture in a photograph the enormity of the remaining winter quarters barns. This barn was used to house the machine shop and wagon shop, while the matching barn out of view to the south housed the elephants and hippos. Today the barn above is home to the museum galleries.

At right is the former wagon and baggage storage shed, which I used during the week as a shady, cozy parking spot for the van.

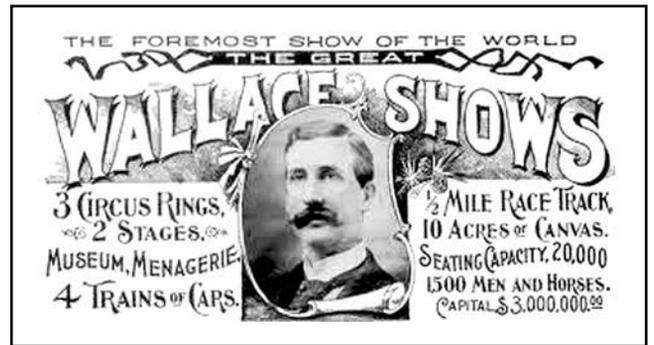


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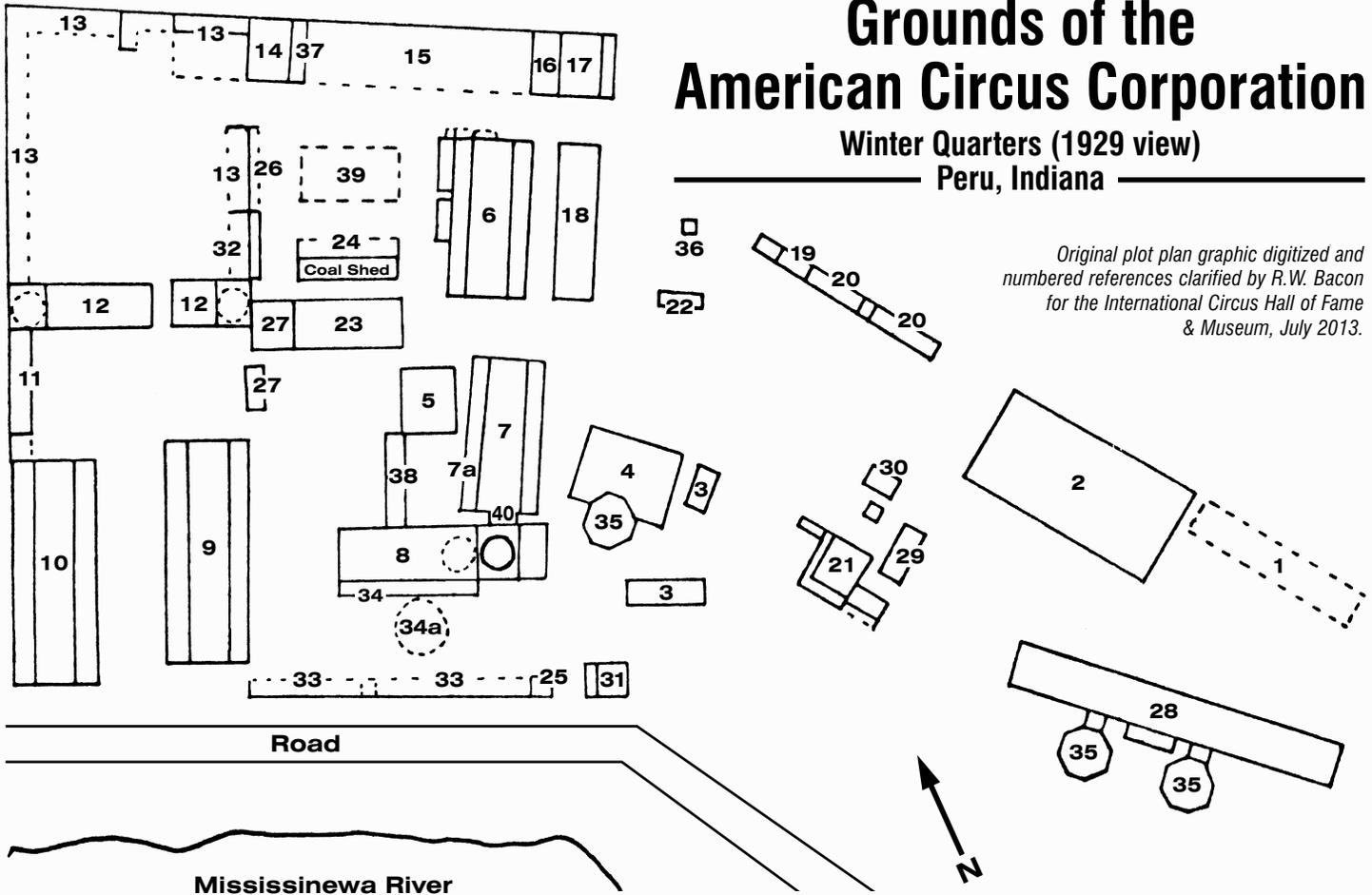
Above is the storage shed on the side of the former elephant and hippo barn, now used for storing circus wagons in various stages of restoration. **Below left** is a long view of the museum grounds and adjacent farmland. It is evident that there is plenty of outdoor space for “unprocessed” collections. **At right** is an 1880s promotional piece for The Great Wallace Shows. **Below right** is the plaque indicating the designation of the winter quarters as a National Historic Landmark in 1987.



Grounds of the American Circus Corporation

Winter Quarters (1929 view)
Peru, Indiana

Original plot plan graphic digitized and numbered references clarified by R.W. Bacon for the International Circus Hall of Fame & Museum, July 2013.



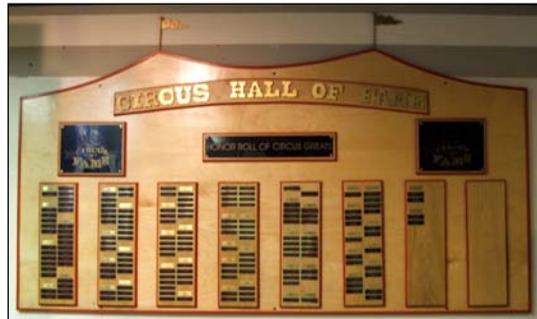
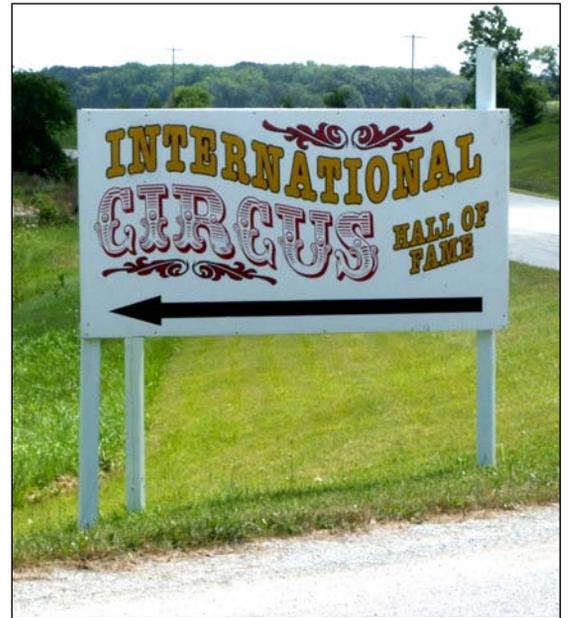
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|--|--|--|
| (1) Loose Straw Storage | (9) Horse Stables (1923) | (20) Bunk House |
| (2) Wagon Storage | (10) Horse Stables (1923) | (21) Dining Room & Kitchen |
| (3) Corn Crib | (11) Stables | (22) Commissary |
| (4) Sells-Floto Pony Stable | (12) Pony Stables | (23) Paint Shop |
| (5) Ostriches & Giraffes | (13) Horse Shelters | (24) Lumber & Coal Shed |
| (6) Machine & Wagon Shop
(2nd Floor - Storage) (1922) | (14) Auto/Electrical Repair Shop | (25) Pump House |
| (7) Elephants & Hippo
(2nd floor - Storage - Hay) | (15) Wagon & Baggage Storage | (26) Lumber Storage |
| (7a) Cats | (16) Kitchen Storage | (27) Horse Shoeing |
| (8) Tigers & Lions
(2nd Floor - Harness Shop) | (17) Tractor Repair | (28) Horses |
| | (18) Side Show Equipment
& Seat Storage | (29) Bunk House |
| | (19) Heating Plant | (30) Slaughter House |
| | | (31) Office |
| | | (32) Dog House & Yard |
| | | (33) Animal Acts
(2nd Floor - Prop Storage) |
| | | (34) Bear Pens |
| | | (34a) Bear Training Arena |
| | | (35) Training Arena |
| | | (36) Incinerator |
| | | (37) Wagon Shed |
| | | (38) Camel Shed |
| | | (39) Pole Shed |
| | | (40) Horse Slaughter |



ABOVE: 1928 postcard view. This aerial view of the grounds is from the north looking south, which is opposite from the numbered diagram view above.

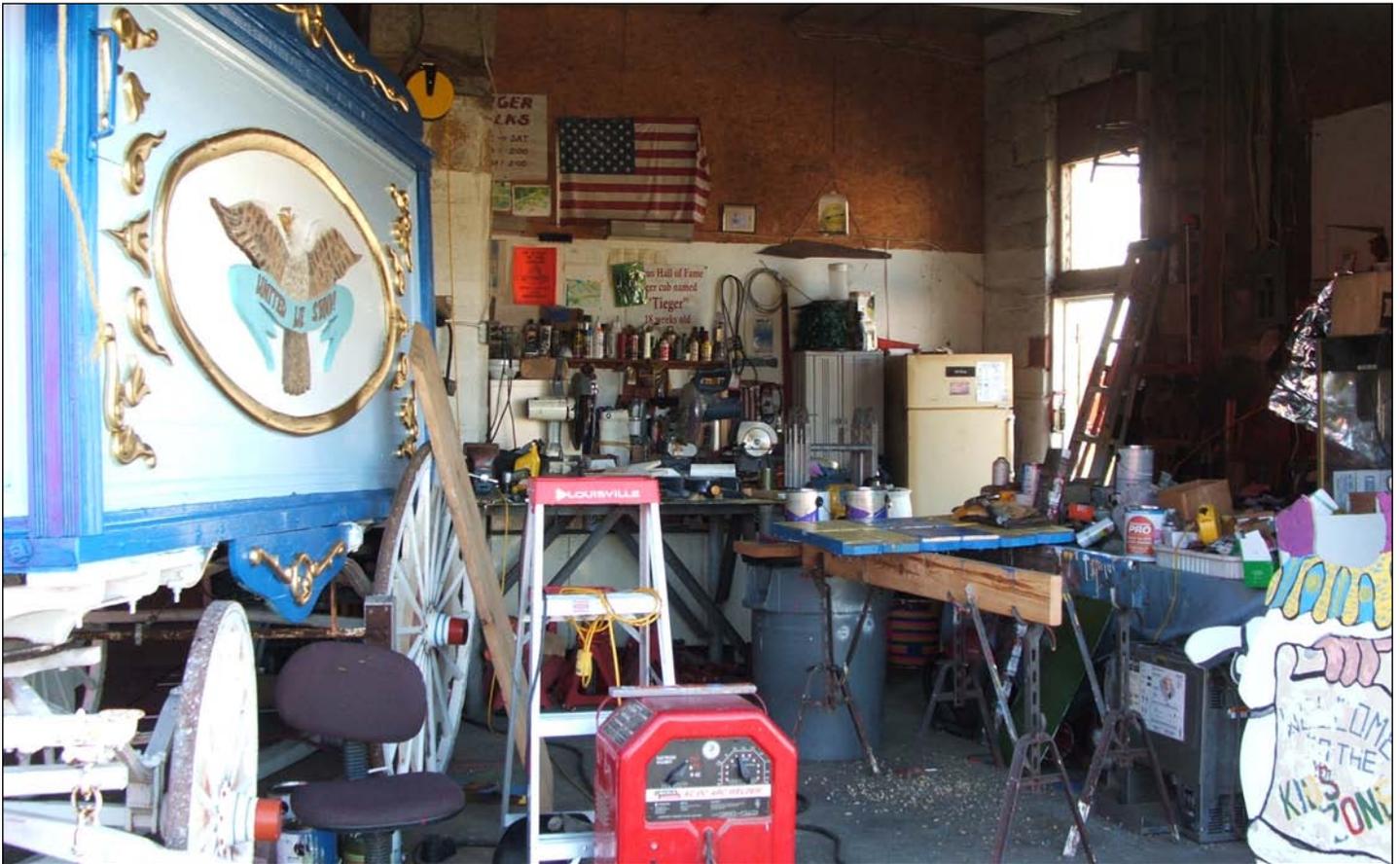
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The Museum



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The Wagons



Above is a view of the wagon restoration shop, which was busy during the week making preparations for the parade in conjunction with the Peru, Indiana Circus City Festival. On the following pages are a selection of restored circus wagons.



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The Wagons



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“Unprocessed Collections”



It is a truism that every special interest museum is underfunded and understaffed. And almost every museum has a backlog of uncataloged collections, or collections objects in severe need of better storage or conservation care. The “unprocessed” collections objects on this page appear to be lowest on the museum’s priority list, but they do make interesting photo compositions that speak loudly and clearly to those close to the museum field ... or close to the fading world of the traveling circus.



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The Godfroy Properties



At left is the home built by the U.S. government for **Francis Godfroy** (1788-1840), chief of the Miami tribe during U.S. efforts to move Indian populations to the West. Below is an 1839 watercolor of the property by **George Winter** (1810-1876). Below left is the home built by **Gabriel Godfroy** (1834-1910), the next chief of the Miami. At left is an 1877 view of the house. Both Godfroys were avidly courted by the U.S. government, but they “worked the system” and remained advocates for their tribe, repeatedly stalling removal efforts. The homes and farms were purchased by **Benjamin Wallace** (1847-1921) in 1892 for use as his circus winter quarters.

