WHEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO KLAMATH FALLS

The Great Wall of China may have been the Seventh Wonder of the World, but in the eyes of many people, the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus would not have been far behind. The man who coined the phrase, "The Greatest Show on Earth," was only guilty of a slight exaggeration. Consider this: In 1923, it took four trains pulling a total of 100 railroad cars, just to transport the show's equipment, animals and people from one show site to the next. When set up was completed this magnificent "canvas city," covered in excess of 14 acres. It had 41 tents, the largest of which was known as the "big-top." It was said that this behemoth could accommodate up to ten thousand spectators at one time, and was the largest tent in the world. A total of 1,600 workers and entertainers regularly traveled with this circus, as did over one thousand animals. What a show!

To many spectators the raising and later dismantling the big-top was a show by itself. This never ending task was just one of a multitude of jobs that had be repeated over and over again as the circus moved from one town to the next. And all this had to be done in a timely manner, too, for to fall behind and arrive late for the next showing was an expensive occurrence, to be avoided at all costs. And to think that this setting up and taking down was to be repeated over and over again, almost on a daily basis for the entire season. This could be as many as 150 times.

People came from miles around to take in this great extravaganza, laughing at the antics of the clowns, cheering to the performance of the expert horseback riders, and looking on in open mouthed awe at the death defying deeds of the "Man on the flying trapeze." Little wonder that young boys were tempted to run away and join the circus.
Worlds Largest Circus Comes for Showing Saturday

Early Saturday morning hundreds of children and grownups will be making their way to the Southern Pacific railroad sidings where the four long trains of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus are scheduled to arrive from Eugene shortly after daylight.

Bringing 1600 people, 50 elephants, 1009 menagerie animals and hundreds of horses, the greatest show on earth will give performances at 2:15 and 8:15 p.m. Saturday at the South Sixth Street show grounds, the doors opening at 1 and 7. Gargantua, the Great world famous giant gorilla featured by the big show will be on exhibition in the mammoth menagerie.

Crowds will undoubtedly be on hand this Saturday morning to see the raising of the canvas city of 41 tents, including the world’s largest big top, now air conditioned, restyled and streamlined. Eight large portable units, installed outside the sidewalls around the entire circumference of the huge tent, take care of the air conditioning.

Adjoining the menagerie tent sight seers will see another 1939 innovation. One of the restyling ideas of John Ringling North, president of the circus. It is the big horse fair tent, in which hundreds of equine aristocrats are on display, including 70 new Kentucky four year olds and other ring stock.

The interior of the big tent is restyled. Within the restyled big top, which is like nothing ever seen under circus canvas before, there are almost countless innovations and features. Exhilarating music in time and tune, by Merle Evans and his famous concert band will enliven the performances, which are crammed with the world's finest and most thrilling displays.

In the huge, steel arena, superimposed on the largest middle ring ever constructed, Terrell Jacobs, world famous wild animal trainer presents the largest group of performing lions and tigers ever seen in America—50 savage, black-maned and striped killers from the jungle.

There is more than an abundance of new foreign acts this year...

Klamath News, Sept. 1, 1939
At the turn of the century (1900) there were something like 100 different traveling circus shows operating within the United States; perhaps more. Most of these were small shows, and operated almost entirely in the states along the eastern seaboard, seldom making it as far west as the Mississippi River.

Although the first recorded incident of a circus moving by rail occurred in 1832, when Charles, Bacon and Edward moved parts of their show around in Georgia by rail, it was not until the early 1850s that the idea really began to catch on. In 1851 the Stone and Madigan Circus used the railroad to transport its equipment from one town to another. From this meager beginning the idea soon began to catch on with other circus owners, and by 1911, when the number of circus trains plying the nation's railroads peaked, no less than thirty-two shows toured the country by rail. When Barnum and Bailey, toured the country in 1923 they required 100 railroad cars to carry all of their paraphernalia, animals and people.
(Continued) Meanwhile, in 1905, Bailey acquired full ownership of the Adam Forepaw & Sells Brothers Circus and then sold half interest to the Ringling's. After the death of Bailey in 1906, the Ringling's purchased the remaining shares of the Forepaw-Sells Circus from his widow. The following year they also purchased their largest competitor, the Barnum and Bailey Circus, thus becoming the largest and most famous and admired circus owners in America. They then decided to divide the nation in half, and continued operating both Ringling Brothers and the Barnum and Bailey Circuses as separate entities. This arrangement continued until 1919 when the two were formally merged, forming the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Combined Shows.

Although both companies had been in the circus business for many years the new, combined show did not make its first trip to the West Coast until 1905. That year it traveled the full length of the state of Oregon from Washington to California, performing under the big top at Portland, Salem, Albany, Eugene, Roseburg, Grants Pass and Medford. Conspicuous by its absence from this list of Oregon cities was Klamath Falls. The circus did not visit Klamath Falls that year, nor would it do so for another 24 years.

Although Barnum and Bailey made return trips to Oregon in 1908, 1910, 1912, 1914, 1916, 1918, 1922, 1923, 1925 and 1927, it was not until August 21, 1929 that this circus finally pitched its tents at Klamath Falls. There was a logical explanation for this long delay, of course. Before this time the only through rail line connecting the Pacific Northwest with California was the Southern Pacific’s Siskiyou Line which went by way of Ashland and Roseburg. Klamath Falls was 70 miles off the beaten path on a dead end branch line at that time and it was simply not a large enough city to justify a 140 mile side trip.

This all changed in 1926 when the Natron Cut-Off was completed, and Klamath Falls at long last found its self on a main line railroad. At that time the line through Klamath Falls became Oregon’s main north-south line and after 1927 the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Combined Shows never routed their circus trains over the Siskiyou line again.

Better records of these other shows have not survived, but such would seem to be the case. It is known that the Clyde Beatty Circus made several forays through the area often performing at smaller towns such as Alturas and Mount Shasta City.
"When I was his age, I did that too." This is what you sometimes hear in that colorful space where the big show performers wait their turn to go out into the rings or be drawn aloft to the dome of the "big top." Often the words come from some wrinkle faced Joey. Perhaps he is speaking to some Polly of the circus who stands by his side in tarlatans and spangles, impatiently listening for the signaling whistle. And as he speaks, the old clown points upward toward the men on the flying trapeze. For there are few veteran clowns who have not been performers in that era of the "white tops" when men "doubled in brass." It then fell to the lot of a single performer to play an instrument in the grand march, do an act in the tent top, clown with the ringmaster, and finally ride a horse in the races. "Toby," in "Polly of the Circus," was such a one.

In Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey circus there are Tobies still. But they no longer "double in Brass." This mammoth institution of modern times carries a total of 1,600 people. It introduces endless features and carries a menagerie of wild animals. In place of the horse drawn vehicles of the bygone wagon show, it moves its wonders on a hundred railroad cars. In this season of 1929 an aerialist is an aerialist and a gymnast is a gymnast. Its horsemen are specialists in their particular line, some of them performing as many as 200 beautiful animals in a single display. And a clown is "only a clown." Of the hundred funny fellows that are to come here Saturday, August 31, the great majority have never done more than cut capers on the hippodrome track. But there are veterans as well, such as Toby Tyler and Buck Baker.

And it is they who pointing to some performer aloft, sometimes say, "When I was young, I did that too." -Klamath News-Oct. 30, 1939
The Clyde Beatty-Russell Brothers circus made several visits to Klamath Falls and other towns in the area in the late 1940s and 1950s.

**THE CIRCUS PARADE STILL ABSENT**

Because of the continually increasing size of the Ringling Brothers & Barnum and Bailey Combined shows, the managing directors have again been obliged to eliminate the usual street parade.

"It was a case of continuing to eliminate this feature or being obliged to reduce the size of the show," said one of the advance agents today. "So we are able to present an even bigger circus than that which toured America in 1928. There are now five herds of performing elephants instead of three, and three additional troupes of trained horses. This immense aggregation of performing animals occupies 22 specially designed railway cars, a corps of more than 60 trainers and assistants who accompanied the animals to this country attend them.

Several hundred performing horses are presented on the great new program of 1929. Two hundred of these thoroughbreds, each ridden by an expert, are exhibited at one time in a marvelously beautiful Equine Ballet. Another display presents five big troupes of liberty horses. These are performed simultaneously, three companies in the three regular rings and two in rings improvised for the purpose on the steel structured stages. The latter is an absolute innovation never before attempted under the "big top."

"That there may be room for the added facilities and yet retain all the rings and stages heretofore used in presenting the human side of the performances, it has been necessary to enlarge the main tent. Thus everything is bigger—everything is heavier—harder to handle than in 1928. There can be no time for a street parade. The immensity of the new circus requires every hour of the morning and all the people of the show to get in place."

Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey will exhibit here Saturday.

*Klamath News August 30, 1929*
The most recognizable name in American circus history was P. T. Barnum. Even though he had little to do with the true circus until he was sixty years old. There were many dramatic persons in the development of the American circus, but Barnum was undoubtedly the most dramatic. He had the uncanny ability to attract public attention through curiosity.
The circus train pauses at Klamath Falls for a crew change in 1989.

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EARLY ROADS, STREETS AND HIGHWAYS
By Todd Kepple

The recent spate of letters to the newspaper editor regarding the new turn lane configuration on Washburn Way reminded us of many street and road projects that have taken place over the years, each with its own set of ramifications for local travelers. In most cases road construction projects – however inconvenient they might be for a season – have proved beneficial in the long run.

One of the largest road construction projects in the early 1900s was development of a highway along the east shore of Upper Klamath Lake. Chapman Construction Co. of Klamath Falls punched the road through in 1915, using what was then deemed an extraordinary amount of dynamite. Extreme care was taken to not damage the Southern Pacific Line, which hugged the shore of the lake below the road bed.

"The road is through almost solid rock, and is very expensive, but will be worth the price, I believe," said Alex Martin of Klamath Falls, as quoted in the Sept. 16 Evening Herald. The new scenic highway along the lake, of course, eliminated the need to negotiate mountain roads over Modoc Rim.

The state announced plans in 1918 to connect Klamath Falls and Bend with a highway running through the Wood River Valley, going up and over Sand Mountain. Acting on a suggestion by Capt. O.C. Applegate in 1930, the state changed the name of the hill from Sand Mountain to Sun Mountain.
A road crew with the W.D. Miller Construction Co. reconstructs a section of South Sixth Street in this undated photo. The type of equipment being used suggests a date in the 1920s.

That same year, Siskiyou County completed a new road that linked Lookout, Calif., with the Lava Beds. The new highway included interpretive signs at sites such as Bear Foot Cave. Capt. Applegate was among the speakers at a dedication ceremony on Sunday, Aug. 8, 1915. The Evening Herald reported the following day that about 20 "machines" (autos) from Klamath Falls were driven by local residents to the ceremony.

The same day's paper, incidentally, reported on a controversy facing the City Council: whether to require a license and collect a fee for anyone using their automobile as a "jitney" to provide transportation services for local residents.

In 1920 Klamath County was doing its part to complete the new The Dalles-California Highway, which came down through Klamath Falls before veering off to the southeast through Merrill. The project encountered stiff opposition from a group of ranchers in the Henley area. In April 1920 rancher George Ehehalt filed a lawsuit seeking to block condemnation of right of way through his 40-acre tract. Klamath County was offering $150 per acre for condemned land, but Ehehalt told officials he would rather pay the county $1,000 to locate the road around his land.

Ehehalt wasn't alone in opposing the highway. Among those opposing condemnation of their property was Sophia Henley, for whom the Henley School was named. Henley sought an injunction against construction activities, and accused contractor Oskar Huber of trespassing on her land.

Neighboring rancher Robert Cheyne, meanwhile, took more direct action, according to the Evening Herald of July 1, 1920. Cheyne released irrigation water into the road bed to bring construction to a halt. In another instance, irrigation water was turned loose on a camp of highway workers, forcing them to get up in the middle of the night and construct dikes around their tents.
It is well known that Topsy Grade was one of the first major roads built into the Upper Klamath Basin in the late 1800s. Believing the road held promise for future improvements, state Sen. George Baldwin of Klamath Falls sponsored legislation in 1920 officially designating Topsy Grade as a state highway. At the time, Topsy Grade remained the primary route for traveling south out of the Upper Klamath Basin. An automobile trip to San Francisco in those days took up to three days.

But another road would soon upstage Topsy Grade. In September 1920 the state Highway Commission allocated funds to complete the Ashland-Klamath Falls highway, which we know today as the Greensprings Highway, or Route 66. The new highway was completed in 1924, and at one time was designated as both Oregon Route 66 and U.S. Highway 97. Highway 97 was rerouted through Midland in 1936, but Oregon's own Route 66 remains a historic highway to this day.

With the rising importance of gasoline-powered log trucks, it soon became apparent that roads and newly paved streets would need considerable improvement. In September 1920, the damage from log trucks on city streets was so severe that the Klamath Falls City Council banned trucks weighing more than five tons from using the streets. The chief of police was authorized to arrest any truck driver found navigating a load of logs on Main Street. It was suspected that log truck traffic was crushing water pipes that lay just below the pavement, and that resulting water leaks were exacerbating the damage.

The strict regulations laid down by the Council brought protest from log truck operators, who pointed out that even empty log trucks weighed nearly five tons -- the city's new limit. Truckers also claimed that water from the local ice plant was damaging a critical section of Spring Street. The truckers offered to lay down rock on a soft section of Spring Street, while the City Council agreed to relax the weight restrictions and implement the state standard of 600 pounds of load for each square inch of tire surface.
Auto travel across town became considerably more convenient when a steel viaduct over the Southern Pacific railroad yard was completed in 1927. The original metal structure, funded by the city and the railroad, stood for 30 years before being replaced by the current concrete overpass.

Another major change came in the late 1950s with construction of the Westside Bypass -- a name that never quite stuck to the section of Highway 97 that runs behind Conger Elementary School, over Link River and along the west shore of Lake Ewauna. The state began construction of the bypass in 1966, starting at the north end of town. A lack of funding kept the new highway from going any farther south than Main Street. Three representatives from the city of Klamath Falls, including then-Councilman Floyd Wynne, traveled to Salem in August 1960 to lobby for completion of the bypass, and received assurance the new section of highway would be completed by 1962. Construction didn't get started, however, until 1968.

The city of Klamath Falls in 1960 took over the old Highway 97 route, which came into town from the north on Biehn Street, down Oregon Avenue and Ninth Street to Main.

Responsibilities at the Klamath County Road Department expanded rapidly in 1960 when it took over responsibility for 500 miles of road on the former Klamath Indian Reservation. About half the roads became county roads, and gave non-Indians unprecedented access to former reservation lands. The other half, which the county managed only temporarily, were used only for access to timber.

A major traffic overhaul in the downtown Klamath Falls area came on Jan. 11, 1970, when the city implemented a one-way grid on Main Street and Klamath Avenue, as well as various side streets. One fender-bender occurred on the first day, but otherwise the adjustment went pretty smoothly. Still, there have been occasional suggestions that going back to a two-way Main Street would be better for downtown businesses.

One longstanding sore spot in the local network of roads in the 1960s was the so-called
"Missing Link," a rough section of road that lay between Kit Carson Way to the north and the Eastside Bypass to the southeast. The gap resulted after the state built the new four-lane highway bringing Highway 97 traffic down to Esplanade, and the county constructed the bypass that ran all the way from South Sixth Street to Main. Nobody, however, seemed to know what to do about the section of road between Main and Esplanade.

One issue that held up progress on the Missing Link was disagreement over what to do with Old Fort Road and Hillside Avenue, which made an awkward alignment with Main Street and the bypass. By 1970 Oregon Highway Commission had won the city's agreement to close both streets off before they reached the bypass, but some 170 residents of the Hillside neighborhood signed a petition protesting the plan. The debate continued for months, with city officials eventually agreeing to keep Hillside open, but to close Old Fort Road.

Thus, in 1971, the Missing Link was eliminated, although the new four-lane bypass continued to suffer an identity crisis. The road was known as Kit Carson Way north of Esplanade, then became Alameda between Esplanade and Main Street, and finally continued on as the Eastside Bypass all the way to South Sixth Street. Because the roadway had various names, there were no street signs anywhere along the entire route. In 2005 the bypass was renamed Crater Lake Parkway.

Meanwhile, Old Fort Road, which had not seen much use by the public since the new highway along Upper Klamath Lake was constructed in 1915, deteriorated considerably over the years. In 1974, property owners along the north end of the road petitioned the county to abandon the road north of the Oregon Tech campus. But the Board of County Commissioners voted on July 17, 1974, to keep the road open to the public.

Old Fort Road remains a beautiful road that is highly recommended for anyone who wishes to take a scenic and historic alternative to Highway 97 on the way to Algoma.

UPCOMING MUSEUM EVENTS

Rattlesnake Point tour – A walk on Saturday, Oct. 6, will take us to the Rattlesnake Point scenic viewpoint on the old Highway 97 route at Algoma. We'll discuss the old Algoma mill, with its fascinating railroad history, and take a look at some of the most intriguing geologic formations in the area. Best of all is the tremendous view of Upper Klamath Lake. This hike will be physically challenging, and will be limited to 25 people at a time. Call 883-4208 for details and to register. Free. Rain or shine.


Oak Woodlands Walk – Our annual acorn gathering event is scheduled for 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 14, at the Running Y Ranch Resort. Presenters will include a wildlife biologist from the Bureau of Land Management. Free!

"Falls or No Falls?" – A presentation at the Klamath County Historical Society's Oct. 25 meeting will review the history of Klamath's falls, and whether they still exist. 7:30 p.m. at the Klamath County Museum.

Volunteer Huddle – We're going to mix things up a little for our annual volunteer recognition gathering. All volunteers are encouraged to join us for a Hawaiian feast at 4 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 4, at the Klamath County Museum. No charge. It's on us!


Breakfast with Santa – 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 8 at the Klamath County Museum.
Meetings are held the 4th Thursday of the month — with some exceptions. Call 883-4208. We meet at the Klamath County Museum meeting room, 1451 Main St., Klamath Falls, Spring Street entrance. For further information call the museum.

**Notice:**
After the July potluck, fortunes were missing their favorite large spoon. If you found you had an extra one when you got home, they would like it back, no questions asked!
Also, a water bottle was left behind on the tour bus in June.

**Next Meeting:**
**October 25—7 pm**
"Falls or No Falls?" — A presentation at the Klamath County Historical Society’s Oct. 25 meeting will review the history of Klamath’s falls, and whether they still exist. 7:30 p.m. at the Klamath County Museum

**Membership Information**
- Individual Member $10.00
- Supporting Member $25.00
- Life Member $100.00

Make your dues payable to:

**Klamath County Historical Society**
and mail to or drop off at:

Klamath County Museum, 1451 Main Street,
Klamath Falls, OR 97601