



MAGIC UNDER ~THE~ **BLACK** **TENT**

BY JOHN F. POLACSEK

The Black Tent — a mystery on the midway, long forgotten in the annals of magic and circus alike. Yet, in the 1890s, crowds thronged to witness the fantastical illusions presented beneath the darkened canvas on the Barnum & Bailey lot. As a reporter for *Brooklyn Eagle* penned in 1889:

“The ‘black tent’ was the great center of attraction before and after the [circus] performance. The illusions are the most remarkable ever produced merely by the influence of light and shade so manipulated as to deceive every eye. Last night an old newspaperman . . . could not be persuaded that the wonderful illusions were not mechanical effects. Even the eloquence of truthful press agent George Starr . . . could not persuade the doubting New Yorker until Mr. Starr, in the interests of truth, revealed the workings of the cabinet mysteries, in each of which, instead of headless bodies, decapitated heads, mermaids, and flora, were pretty young ladies. Then, and only then, were the newspaperman’s doubts removed.”

The worlds of magic and the circus have become intertwined on a number of occasions. Illusions as attractions have been presented in the performance ring, as concert features, in the menagerie, and in the proverbial sideshow.

The 1890s were banner years for magicians on circuses. Harry and Bessie Houdini were en route with Welsh Brothers Circus. John G. Scheidler, a magician and lecturer who had been with the Barnum & Bailey Show the previous two seasons, signed with Ringling Brothers Circus for the 1899 season. Prof. Hugo worked on the Walter L. Main Circus, Gus Burkhart was on the Sig Sautelle Circus, Charles Griffin ran the sideshow on Bob Hunting’s Circus, and Fred Morphet performed on the Adam Forepaugh Circus.

A number of magicians created more than just illusions, as complete circuses were developed by the likes of Joel E. Warner, Charles Andress, Sig Sautelle, and P.T. Barnum. However, the focus of this article is on the fabled Black Tent of the Barnum & Bailey Circus, and a few related associations.

One might say that it was P.T. Barnum who promoted magic under the big top through a major advertising campaign that was conducted in conjunction with Hood & Company of Lowell, Massachusetts. In the late 1880s, advertising cards were circulated to promote the concert features of the Barnum Circus, along with Hood’s Sarsaparilla — a popular carbonated medicinal beverage, flavored with sassafras. P.T. Barnum stated, “A big show for a small amount will be given immediately after the regular ring performance, embracing a great variety of highly sensational acts,

comic songs, and character sketches, by the best company ever seen under canvas."

Such "concerts," in which the patrons purchased a ticket to a special after-show performance that went on in the same tent as the main attraction, could be found on circuses as early as 1857. While the drawing power of P.T. Barnum's name was a major one, the Barnum Show in 1886 had the additional enticements of a sideshow and a concert feature. In the sideshow, Mr. W.B. Wood acted as lecturer in addition to performing as prestidigitator and working a Punch & Judy act.

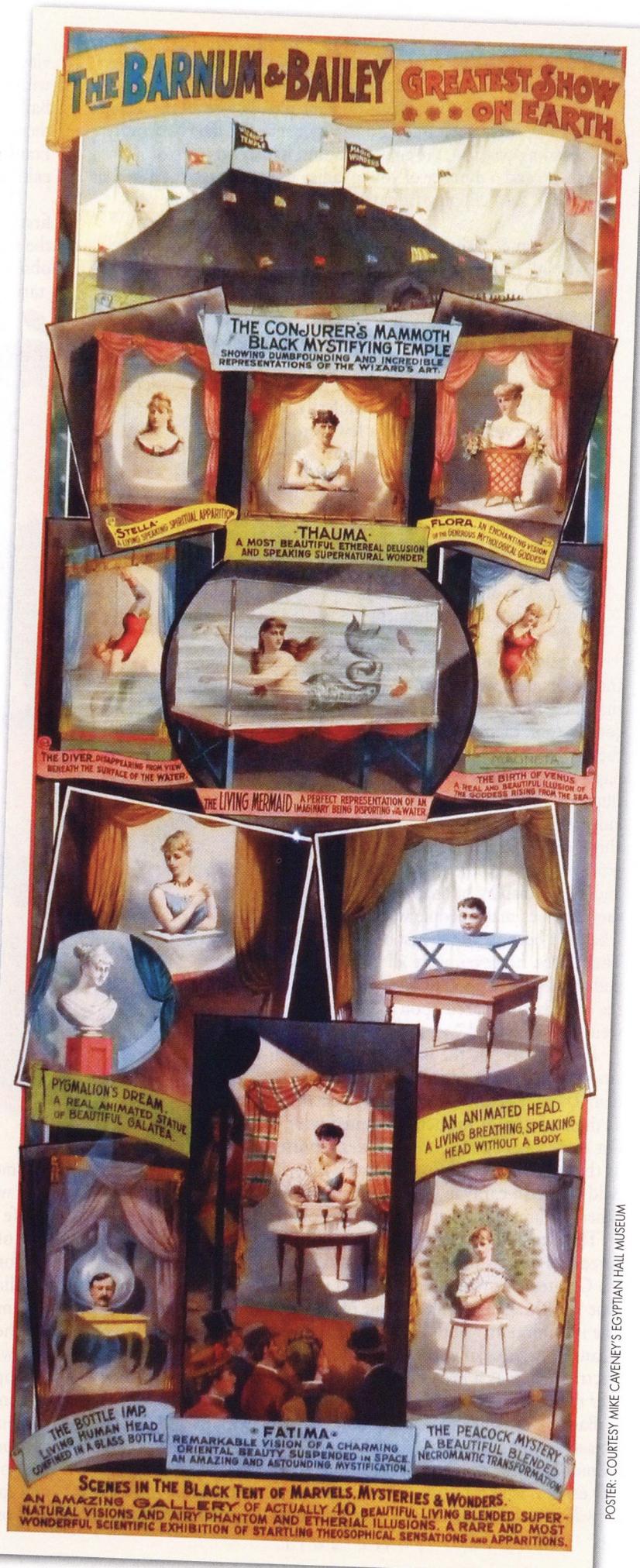
The cross-marketing trade cards proclaimed that when the Hippodrome was over, "Don't Leave Your Seats... but delay a while and see a young, beautifully formed, and handsome Lady Dissolve into Air, right under your eyes." Another Hood card suggested that the patrons should stay in their seats so that they could witness "The Best Concert and Variety Programme Ever Offered." There were seven artists who were "positively appearing in the After-Entertainment of Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth," plus a finale. This program would conclude "with the marvelous Cremation Illusion, in which a beautiful young lady is Incinerated Before The Eyes Of All Beholders, a most thrilling act!"

The magician who was responsible for the presentation of the Cremation act was none other than Frederick Eugene Powell. According to Powell, in 1886 he traveled on Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth, presenting his Cremation act in the concert, as promised on the back of the Hood's Sarsaparilla trade cards. Professor Powell was still on the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1889; however, he changed venues. The concert went on in the big top with Sig. Montana presenting the Cremation illusion. The crowd that did not attend the concert filled the midway outside and was soon lured by the lecturer into the sideshow. It was in the annex that Prof. Powell could be found on a platform, doing magic and his Punch & Judy act. It is possible that the sideshow was a more lucrative location, because it allowed the performer to sell photos and magic books to the crowds watching from below.

Breaking new ground and attaining new dimensions was part of the 1889 Barnum & Bailey Circus. For one ticket, a patron could see under acres of canvas "Three Colossal Circuses," a "Wild Moorish Caravan," the "Paris Olympic Hippodrome," an "Immense Double Menagerie," a "Magnificent Horse Fair," a "Gigantic Marvel Museum," and the "Wonderful Black Tent Illusion."

The wonders presented under the Black Tent were created by the magician Frank Hoffman and were first used indoors at Madison Square Garden when the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth opened a four-week stand on March 23, 1889. The *New York Times* noted, "One feature of the show is particularly novel. The front hall, over the main entrance, is to be filled with illusions and automatons. It is being decorated in a most elaborate style, and when finished, will be but dimly lighted. On the road, this section of the show will be placed under a tent of black canvas."

A call had been issued to all the performers to gather at New York's Madison Square Garden at 10 o'clock on March 18, 1889. The show needed to rehearse before it opened on March 23, and the mechanical part of the Hall



[Facing page] An 1890 illustration depicting the crowds viewing Barnum & Bailey's Black Tent exhibits. A two-sheet poster hawking the mysteries of the black sideshow tent in 1898.

of Illusions needed to be fine-tuned. Most of the Black Tent displays were presumably accomplished by black-art techniques, although some likely relied on various mirror principles. Before all the illusions could be set, there needed to be a beauty contest at the Garden. At the beginning of April, the circus was into its second week of performances, and a number of young ladies were required for a special assignment. As a clipping from the *New York Times* relates:

Barnum & Bailey were in need of ten young women for their Hall of Illusions and therefore advertised for “respectable young ladies, between sixteen and twenty years of age,” to travel with the show from five to seven months.

The result of this advertisement was the application of fully 200 women at Madison Square Garden yesterday morning, the time set for inspection. Many of the applicants were manifestly older than twenty years, and a few were younger than sixteen. They all came with the consent of their parents or guardians, and were extremely anxious to join the circus. Ten of the most attractive were selected, and will hereafter pose in the Hall of Illusion. The others went away in sorrow and disappointment.

It was not until a weeklong training course was completed that the winners of the beauty contest took their places before the public. A note in the newspaper read: “In the Hall of Illusions upstairs, the ten young ladies whose engagement was chronicled in *The Times* last week made their first appearance, and by the display of only part of their persons made people wonder what had become of the rest of them. Their faces, however, were all visible, and as they were good to look upon, the crowds who gazed upon them finally went away satisfied.”

For four weeks, the Barnum & Bailey circus was well received in Madison Square Garden. There was an overwhelming demand for seats as the majority of the acts presented were entirely new. On April 14, *The New York Times* reported, “Novel features, as the dwarf hairy elephant riding a bicycle, the trained animals, wild Moorish caravan, hall of illusions, hippodrome races, and other features have met with the approbation of every visitor.”

The circus closed its indoor engagement on April 20 and then spread its canvas for a week in Brooklyn, starting April 22. When the Greatest Show on Earth opened in Brooklyn, it was the first time the “Magician’s Black Tent of Illusion” covered the earth. The illusion tent, “with its wonderful optical effects, produced by means of a series of cubic nets and the brilliant arrangement of electric lights, as a broad expanse of black canvas, [was] the first ever raised by a show.”

Barnum & Bailey’s Greatest Show on Earth, with its 1,001 attractions, was a huge success in Brooklyn. In attendance was P.T. Barnum himself, who was quoted, “We give all for the small sum of fifty cents... Isn’t it wonderful?” A reporter also noted that immense crowds were filling the tents — acres of them — for an opportunity to

view a world of wonders. “The great crowds were more than pleased with the exhibition. In addition to the menagerie Messrs. Barnum & Bailey have this year, an entirely new attraction, or rather a series of them, are exhibited in a separate tent made of black canvas. It is Dr. Frank Hoffman’s gallery of supernatural illusions and visions, and the exhibition is a marvelous and startling one, to say the least.”

The *Brooklyn Eagle* reporter noted that the Black Tent — “the first one known in the annals of circusdom” — contained “some of the most marvelous features . . . One of the most amusing can be observed by standing near a cabinet and listening to the commentaries of the crowd as they gaze on these wonders.

“Barnum’s was literally packed to the roof last night; the interior of the vast tent was an amphitheatre of faces without a single break in the continuity . . .

Yesterday for the first time the illusions were tried with the incandescent electric light, which is much more difficult to control than gas, but it worked fairly well. Mr. Barnum, along with his other effects, carries a complete electric plant.”

While P.T. Barnum is usually given credit for the show and the attractions, his partner James A. Bailey devised the novel attraction of the Magician’s Black Tent of Illusion. As detailed in an 1890 Barnum & Bailey advertising piece, the forty matchless works of magic included the following supernatural illusions:

The Birth of Aphrodite. This magic triumph opened with a view of the ocean; the horizon illuminated by the prismatic, shooting rays of the Northern Lights. The life-size apparition of Venus, bathed in the rosy tints of the Aurora Borealis, rose from the waves, ascended into airy space and, after assuming a number of bewitching poses, disappeared by diving headlong into the deep.

Pygmalion’s Dream. The audience was permitted to inspect a marble statue of Galatea, which was then placed in full view on its pedestal.

Wonder of wonders, its cheeks slowly reddened, the hair assumed a natural color, the marble warmed into dainty flesh, the eyes were illumined with intelligence, and the lovely creation came to life and spoke. The last and most startling transformation was that of the beautiful nymph back into stone, which finally assumed the form of a skeleton. This tableau may have been akin to the familiar Girl to Gorilla illusion, or was perhaps achieved by using a form of the Blue Room principle with a large mirror.

The Witch’s Head. In this “incredible achievement,” a square box was placed upon an ordinary table in full view. The box was opened at the front, and a living, speaking, human head was shown. The box was then taken from the table and exhibited to the audience with the head still in it. Magicians will recognize this as a version of the classic Sphinx Table.

Flora. A most beautiful revelation, in which the head and bust of a lovely living woman appeared in a basket of flowers. This version of the Half Girl illusion likely relied on mirrors.



The Headless Trooper. In this marvelous mystery, a variation on the Headless Girl, a soldier was revealed lying on the ground, with his living head resting on a tray several feet above the body.

Narcisse. In this aerial marvel, the upper half of a young lady's person was shown on the seat of a swing, which oscillated in open space. Like several of the optical tricks displayed in the Black Tent, this black art illusion was explained in Albert A. Hopkins' 1897 illustrated text, *Magic: Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions, Including Trick Photography*.

She. The title character of H. Rider Haggard's fantasy novel appears here as she did in the story: a vision of beauty, seen through a misty veil. This may have been done with a sheet of glass, in the manner of Pepper's Ghost, although the Hopkins book describes Powell's version of She as a woman who disappeared from atop a table, having been covered with a cloth and "cremated."

The Mermaid. This mythological miracle presented "a beautiful amphibious being, half woman and half fish, disporting in a miniature lake of living water."

The Wizard's Aquarium. In this amazing creation, a fishbowl was shown empty and then magically filled with living fish. While the Mermaid display was the Girl in a Fishbowl gag, the Aquarium was probably accomplished by having fish released from the bottom of the bowl.

The Peacock Mystery. In another effect relying on mirrors, the blending of a beautiful woman's living head and shoulders with the body of a peacock was described as "one of the prettiest of these necromantic transformations." In this vision, the peacock's gorgeous tail unfolded and closed at will.

Fatima. This was an illusion in which the upper part of an Oriental beauty's body rested on a stool, which in turn rested on an undraped table.

The Bottle Imp. A living human head was seen inside a narrow-necked, transparent glass bottle. This was similar to the Mermaid illusion, but smaller, with just the head being projected into the bottle.

The Fairy Bouquet. "The most beautiful and bewildering illustration of the birth and death of the flowers," which would bud, blossom, wither, and die in their few moments of magical life. This sounds like a version of the Blooming Rose Bush in which the petals are pushed fully out until they fall to the floor.

Meteora. In what may have been a levitation scene, a star-born sprite danced, revolved, and disported like a bird in midair.

The Alaska Wonder, Neptune's Bride, The Centaur, The Transmigration of Indus, Grecian Metamorphoses, The Gnome's Carnival, and "many other equally novel, droll, incomprehensible, and indescribable spectacles" were included.

After the usual tenting season ended, the Barnum & Bailey Circus spent from September 30 to November 9 en route to London. The show sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to Liverpool, England, for a run at the London Olympia from November 11, 1889, to February 15, 1890. The indoor circus presented a three-ring and two-stage performance, along with the menagerie and the Hall of Illusions.

The official list of show property on tour includes a number of Professor Frank Hoffman's illusions. There were

forty illusion cabinets, peacock (eight pieces), cabinet (seven pieces), Fatima (seven pieces, four mirrors, and curtains), Mermaid (seven pieces, two mirrors, and curtains), Rhoda (nine pieces, two mirrors, and curtains), Thaum (nine pieces, one mirror, one bust, and curtains), Galatea (39 pieces, one mirror, two busts, and curtains) suspension table (seven pieces), 39 brackets and reflectors, and one shunting box.

The circus returned from London the following spring of 1890. An ad in *The New York Clipper* noted that F. Hoffman, Barnum & Bailey's illusionist, was home from the London excursion. He could be reached at 62 Franklin Street, Jersey Heights, New Jersey. While overseas, he had been able to procure some of "Europe's Latest Illusions and Magicians' Novelties."

In March, another advertisement in the *Clipper* noted: "For sale — Eight of the famous Hoffman illusions used by Barnum & Bailey in The Greatest Show on Earth last season." These illusions were listed as "being in perfect order," considering that they had been shipped to England and back to the States. The illusions were ready for immediate use with any show, together with the boxes, lights, and all necessary furniture. Among the illusions were: The Mermaid, The Headless Trooper, Rolla, Thoda, Automatic Mill, Omega, Aerial Suspension, and Aphrodite. There were also twelve Automatic Performers, nearly new and in perfect condition. Those who were interested could contact F. Hoffman, care of Barnum & Bailey Office, 1127 Broadway, New York.

Ads for recycled circus equipment and illusions were common in the *New York Clipper*. Hoffman needed to dispose of his used illusions so he could produce new attractions for the 1890 edition of the Barnum & Bailey Black Tent. At the same time, there were a number of circus proprietors who wanted to offer something unusual to



Some of the Black Tent acts: [facing page] bodiless Thaum; [clockwise from left] Flora, whose lower half seems to be a plant; Magneta, enacting the Birth of Venus; and Stella, "a living, speaking spiritual apparition."

the public. Just a short distance away, at 201 Centre Street in New York City, was the office of the newly created Washburn & Arlington's Circus, Menagerie, and Hippodrome. In March 1890, their ads appeared in the *Clipper*, seeking good people for the concert, sideshow, and circus, and for a man to do magic, Punch & Judy, and illusion displays.

It appears that the Washburn & Arlington Show purchased the used illusions and a black tent from Prof. Hoffman. Leon Washburn and George Arlington organized a new circus in 1890 and, based on a lithograph illustrating their new "Monster Black Tent of Magic Visions," there were some similar arrangements to the Barnum & Bailey Black Tent view. While the names of some of the attractions were changed, the basic arrangement within the Black Tent was similar: Lady on Swing, Coronetist, Lady in Basket of Flowers, Card Writer, Mermaid, Imp in Bottle, etc.

Leon Washburn came from a family of showmen who started with Washburn's Great Indian Amphitheatre and Circus from 1854 to 1857. Leon's personal career began in 1882 with Washburn's United Monster Shows, in 1884 the Washburn & Hunting Circus, and in 1890 he joined with George Arlington.

George Arlington was into sideshows and unique attractions, having managed the original Aztecs as a sideshow attraction on the Van Amburgh Circus in 1885. He joined the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1886, working in the confectionary department as the superintendent of a candy stand. In 1888, he was manager of privileges on the Barnum & Bailey Circus, which put him in contact with the concert and sideshow

attractions. In 1890 and '91, Arlington was a proprietor and the general agent of the Washburn & Arlington Circus. He returned to the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1899, moving up from 1903 to 1905 to become manager of privileges and owner of the sideshow and annex.

The brand new Washburn & Arlington Show opened May 1 at Bristol, Pennsylvania. Their circus and hippodrome tent was a 120-foot round, with three 42-foot middle pieces; the dressing room tent was a 50-foot round top; there was a 70-foot round top sideshow with a 30-foot middle piece; and they also used a black illusion tent. The whole show was moved on a train of twelve cars made up of two boxcars, one sleeper, and seven flat cars, with two advertising cars in advance.

Among the performers on the show were S.F. Cody's troupe of cowboys and sharpshooters, including Wichita Jack, Wild Horse Jack, Yellow Stone Bill, and White Cloud's troupe of Indians. The annex feature comprised forty wild bronco horses, eight Arabs, ten Indians, ten cowboys, and ten Mexicans, while the sideshow carried a Marimba Band and a Guatemalan dwarf.

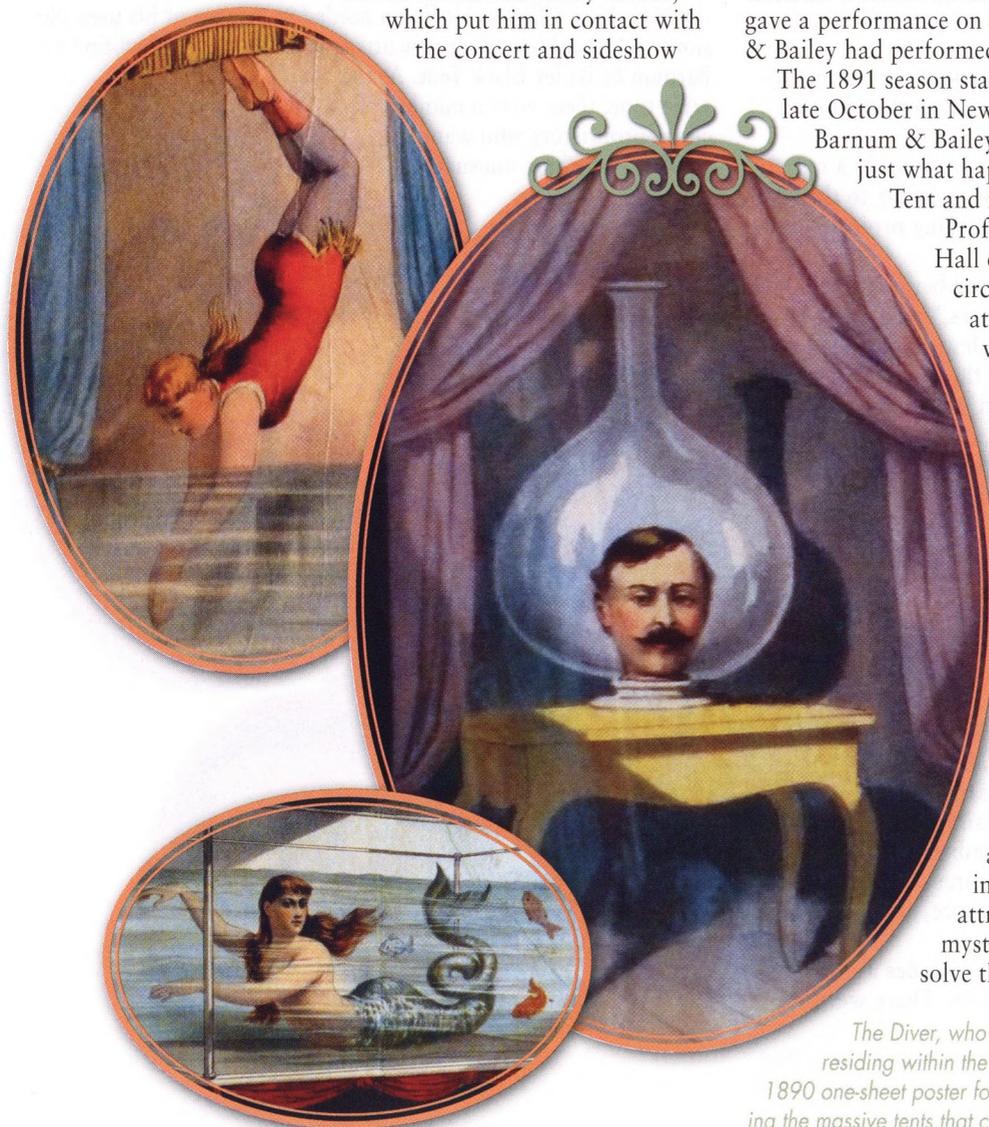
The 1890 season opened to big business at Bristol, Pennsylvania, and despite a number of rainy days it was found necessary to add two new fifty-foot middle pieces to the tent. The show moved up into New England; by September, it was in Virginia and headed for Georgia. As the show approached Atlanta, it was following in the path of the Barnum & Bailey Circus, which had played the town on October 15 and 16. The Washburn & Arlington Circus gave a performance on October 24 on the same lot where Barnum & Bailey had performed a week earlier.

The 1891 season started at Atlanta in early April and closed in late October in New York. While the recycled effects from the Barnum & Bailey show did live on for at least two years, just what happened to the Washburn & Arlington Black Tent and illusions is unknown.

Professor Hoffman continued to present the Hall of Illusions in 1890; however, when the circus opened in New York City under canvas at 110th Street and Fifth Avenue, the feature was listed in newspaper advertisements as "Black Art Illusions." It was noted that at the circus a "number of new features await the old folks, who will go tonight on the children's account, among them being an illusion which was secured in Paris during the trip abroad."

The crowds who attended the opening night of the circus filled every seat under the big top and hundreds were turned away. It was noted by a reporter that "those who came early viewed the menagerie before they went to the main tent. There were caged animals all around the tent and the big fellows — elephants, camels, etc. — in the center. A team of very large white dromedaries probably drew around them the most admiring crowd, and the monkey cage, as usual, attracted many... The new illusion proved a mystery to all the visitors and few were able to solve the old ones."

The Diver, who disappears in the water; The Bottle Imp, a head residing within the glass; The Living Mermaid. [Facing page] An 1890 one-sheet poster for Washburn & Arlington's Black Tent. Photo showing the massive tents that comprised a Barnum & Bailey lot.





POSTER: COURTESY BOB SHEETS

The 1890 route book for the Barnum & Bailey Circus was published at the end of the season and documented the Illusion Department of the show, noting that the department contained “a collection of the latest and most wonderful deceptions.” These modern mysteries were under the personal direction of Professor F. Hoffman, assisted by Mrs. Frank Hoffman, their daughter Hilda, and five other young women playing the onstage roles. The illusions on exhibit were: Magneta, Goddess of the Seas; Galatea; Omega; Diana; Fatima; La Sybill; and Thaumia.

After the circus performance, the concert, with its own nine-piece orchestra, provided the music for a male impersonator, song-and-dance duo, comedy and sketch artists, champion clog dancer, and tambourine soloist. The concert was concluded with Professor F. Hoffman’s “Hypnota, The Marvelous Psycho-Psychological Séance.” The Barnum & Bailey route books for 1890 and ’91 list the names of the concert acts, but because the books were private publications for those on the show, it was assumed that the reader knew what the acts were, so no additional descriptions were included.

A commercial advertisement in the back of the 1890 route book lists “Professor F. Hoffmann assisted by Mme. Hoffman, the World-Renowned Prestigitateurs and P.T. Barnum’s Illusionists.” The advertisement also contains the classic line “The Art of Pleasing is that of Deceiving.”

When the Barnum & Bailey Circus opened the tenting season in April 1891 in Brooklyn, New York, after their run at Madison Square Garden, the show again featured Hoffman’s “Black Art Illusions” under canvas. Thaumia, Diana, Sybil (now spelled with one L instead of two), and Fatima remained from the previous season. Two new exhibits, Rhoda and La Aphrodite, were added. And, as in the year before, Prof. F. Hoffman concluded the concert program with Hypnota.

By 1892, the Hoffman exhibition was listed in the newspaper advertisements as “Supernatural Illusions” and was considered one of the drawing cards of the show. *The New York Times* reported on March 27, “The manner in which the attractions of the show have been advertised has borne good fruit, while the character of the show itself, with its menageries, museums, queer animals, mystifying illusions, circus in three rings, performances on two stages, hippodrome, and the spectacle of ‘Columbus and the Discovery of America’ has made every visitor an enthusiastic indorser [sic].”

The extensive aviary and aquarium, along with the black-canvas Hall of Illusions, were observed by a Chicago newspaper reporter in 1892: “[The] number of clever illusions, showing sirens swinging in aerial revels, or nestling half-hidden in immense bouquets, give us a share of interest to the exhibit in the zoological and botanical departments.”

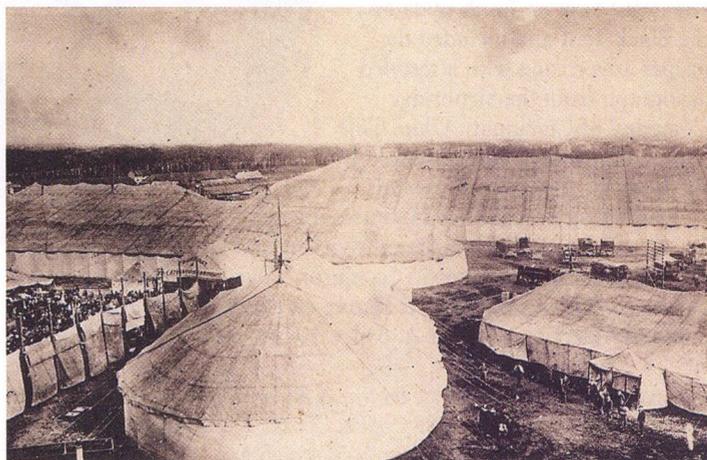


PHOTO: COURTESY JOHN F. POLACSEK

By March 18, 1893, the Illusion Department on the Greatest Show on Earth had been reduced and their location moved for the season opening at Madison Square Garden. Circus patrons could find “the two menageries, the curious animal freaks, and the magic illusions, all of which are in the basement of the building.”

The Illusion Department was being downsized, and the season route book noted only the following illusions in 1893: Cupid, Aphrodite, and Electra. As for the concert following the circus, The Hoffmans — Frank and Zarita — presented the Mysterious Cabinet Séance, but did not close the show.

After almost a decade on the Barnum & Bailey shows, the Hoffmans left the circus, and the role of magician was downsized to individual acts. An April 1897 newspaper advertisement for the circus noted that, in addition to curious animals and odd quadrupeds, there were new vaudeville entertainments. These included male and female magicians, jugglers, dancers, fire kings, lightning calculators, snake charmers, the conjoined Orissa twins, a giantess nearly nine feet tall, a midget, and other living human curiosities, who were presented without extra charge.

New to the scene was platform magic — tricks with small objects, as opposed to large illusions — and one of the best performers of that style was Gus (Gustave) Burkhart. This great “King of Coins” was added to the Barnum & Bailey sideshow and performed as a coin manipulator and comic conjurer. Burkhart had learned magic while working as a bartender in New York City’s Bowery District. He also spent some time on James A. Bailey’s other circus, the Forepaugh & Sells Brothers Consolidated Circus.

At the end of the 1897 tenting season, the Barnum & Bailey circus sailed to England, having recycled an old idea with new props and flair before invading the United Kingdom. It was in 1898 that the Greatest Show on Earth updated the Black Tent and included the proper advertising with a restyled lithograph from the Strobridge Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. This recycled attraction was produced by the magician Prof. Henry Roltair.

Henry Roltair had been 25 years old when he journeyed to the United States from England in 1877, listing his occupation as “conjurer.” Two years later, he was performing as a concert feature on the Cooper & Bailey Circus under the direction of James A. Bailey. Henry went on to be employed

by the Sells Brothers Circus, bringing Roltair’s Illusions to the show when it sailed to Australia in late 1891. He is credited with the invention of the Spidora illusion — a giant spider with the head of a human woman, clinging to a web over a set of stairs — which was included in the trip Down Under. The 1892 route book for the show noted the illusions presented as: The Water Nymph, The Spider, The Mermaid, A Safe Place, Sphinx, Swinging Head, Sliding Bust, Half Lady, Headless Man.

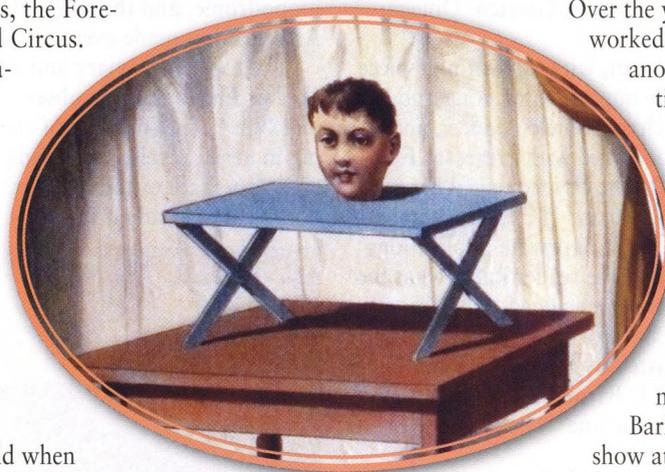
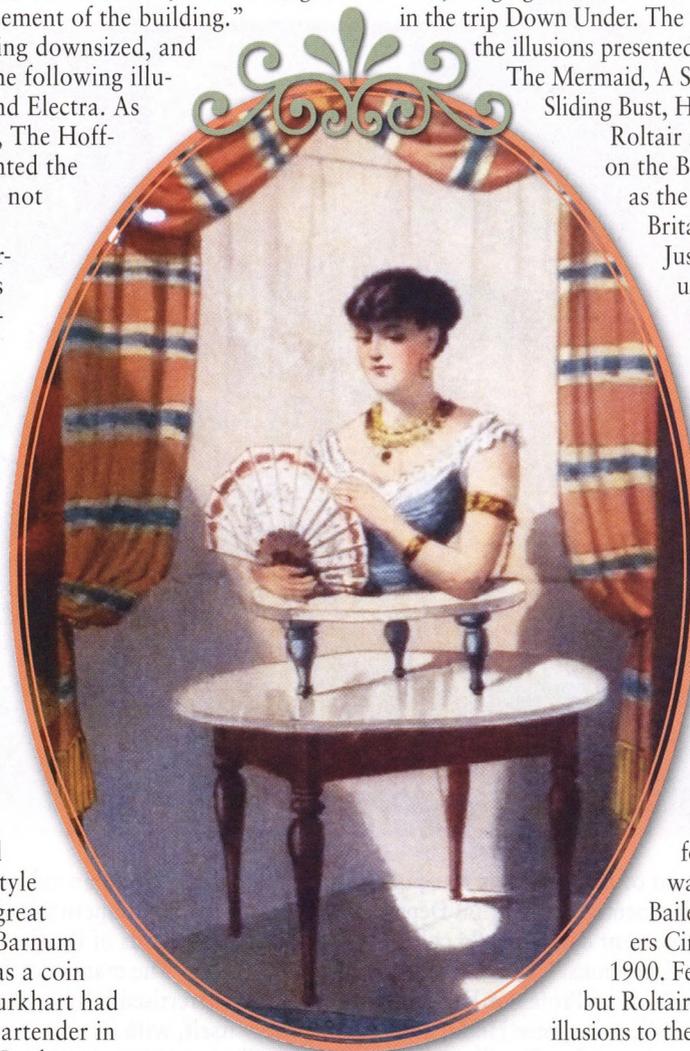
Roltair returned to work for James A. Bailey on the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1897, just as the show was headed for a tour of Great Britain and the European Continent.

Just how long he was on the show is unknown, but a lithograph featured the special illusions under the Black Tent. A large caption on the poster noted “Chaste, Charming, Weird & Wonderful Supernatural Illusions, Astonishing Magical Achievements Vividly Produced. Living & Breathing Headless Bodies, Talking Human Heads, Revolving Sprites, Beautiful Mermaids, Gruesome Gnomes & Curious Flying People. Created By Roltair, The Magician.” All of this was to take place in a special Black Tent — the feature that had been introduced eight years earlier by Frank Hoffman.

Roltair did not confine his illusionary activities to one circus show, for while the Barnum & Bailey Circus was in Europe the other unit owned by Bailey, the Adam Forepaugh & Sells Brothers Circus, also featured a Black Tent in 1900. Few details are known of this operation, but Roltair clearly had his mind set on bringing illusions to the masses.

Over the years, a large number of magicians worked on circuses, yet for one reason or another very few biographies include their time spent under the big top. It is possible that there was a negative stigma attached to working on a circus as opposed to the stage. A hint of what conflict there might have been comes from the *Mabatma*, one of the early publications that kept track of magicians’ whereabouts. In July 1904, it was reported in this prestigious journal that the magician Prof. Windecker was with the Barnum & Bailey circus, having joined the show at Brooklyn on April 25. The editor did include one snide comment that the good professor was “too good a magician to be with a circus.” **M**

John F. Polacsek became interested in tracing the routes of early circuses after discovering an 1835 metal printing plate that a branch of the Zoological Institute used to advertise their menagerie while traveling through Ohio. He lives in Detroit and is vice president of the Circus Historical Society.



Two more of the acts seen on the Barnum & Bailey poster, printed by the Strobridge Lithographic Co. in 1889: Fatima, another bodiless woman, and “An Animated Head,” with even less of a body than Fatima.