

Way We Were

April 1, 2015

Step Right Up! The Circus Comes to Park City

By: Jenette Purdy, Director of Education, Park City Museum

Come one! Come all! To the greatest show on Earth!

Anytime the circus was coming to town, posters would be placed on the sides of buildings, on poles outside of businesses, and, of course, the circus was advertised with much fanfare in the *Park Record*. Every upcoming circus was, “Coming in its own special trains. All Nations Greatest Arenic Representatives! Rarest Wild Beast Gathering that Ever Invited Public Notice.”¹ Upon arrival, each one was always the best, the greatest, the most spectacular. In follow-up stories, however, the *Park Record* often conceded that, “The show was not all it was claimed to be, but then we never expect to witness all that the bills call for and so people were not much disappointed.”² But living up to its billing or not, the circus came through Park City.

The Great Horne Bros. Circus was scheduled to roll in on May 2, 1951. The *Park Record* built anticipation for the event, hosted by the Volunteer Fire Department, declaring: “The Great Horne Bros. Circus...will erect their magic tent city on the lower Park avenue show grounds.” It was billed to have European performers of “international acclaim,” highly trained horses, elephants, ponies, dogs, monkeys and wild animals, as well as a rodeo, cowboys, cowgirls, Wild West and ground and aerial sensations. Surely there would be enough to capture the minds of young and old alike!³ Unfortunately, as can happen during spring in the Rockies, the circus was “snow bound” in Monte Vista, Colorado and had to cancel its Park City stop.⁴

But all was not lost! The *Park Record* was able to announce on May 10, 1951: “Circus Coming To Town. Hurry—Hurry—Hurry. Come one—come all. Circus coming to town after all. Complete with side shows, clowns, animals, lions, lion tamer, strong man, etc. Even popcorn and pink lemonade. Presented by the Cub Scouts of Troops 1, 2, and 3...Everyone invited—bring your children and see what these boys can do.”⁵ And so, the Cub Scout pack meeting commenced on May 14 in the Memorial building. Everyone enjoyed the “circus” and it was deemed a great success.⁶ The cub scouts aptly held a handwritten sign that read: “The Best Circus in the World”.⁷

¹ Park Record, May 13, 1893.

² Park Record, August 16, 1884.

³ Park Record, April 5, 1951.

⁴ Park Record, April 12, 1951.

⁵ Park Record, May 10, 1951

⁶ Park Record, June 28, 1951.

⁷ Descriptions from photos in Park City Museum collection. Photo ID # 1951.120.3 and 1951.120.7.

Come one! Come all! To the Park City Museum's latest traveling exhibit Opening Party on April 6 from 6:00-8:00 at the Park City Museum (528 Main Street). The Park City Museum's traveling exhibit, "Step Right Up! Behind the Scenes of the Circus Big Top, 1890-1965" will be on display from April 6-Aug 11. For more information visit www.parkcityhistory.org or call 435-649-7457.



Caption: During the May 1951 pack meeting, Cub Scouts dressed as clowns, animals, a fat lady, a two-headed man, a strongman, a tall man, and a ringmaster marched through the Memorial Building in a circus procession.

Credit: Park City Historical Society & Museum, Kendall Webb Collection

Image ID: 1951.120.7