

And so we come to 1981 with the Circus in Providence this year at the Civic Center instead of under canvas and minus its lone rare animal exhibit --- quite a change from the "Real Lyon" exhibit of 1720.

Au revoir till September!

RF 895 C8 C83
Cranston

June, 1981

CRANSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
1351 CRANSTON STREET
CRANSTON, R.I. 02920

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CRANSTON • RHODE ISLAND 02920

NEWSLETTER

Next Meeting
Tuesday, June 16, 1981
6:00 P.M.

SPRAGUE MANSION

ANNUAL PICNIC SUPPER

At last we've gotten to the kind of warm weather again that makes outdoor picnics so enjoyable. For the benefit of the new members, perhaps we'd better explain that this last meeting of the year is held under the elms at the Mansion strictly for relaxation and a leisurely picnic supper - no program and no business meeting. Just bring along a TV table and a folding chair for your own convenience and stay as long or as little as you like depending upon your own busy schedule.

Blackstone Caterers will again provide the picnic and you can expect three kinds of sandwiches, chicken wings, Swedish Meat Balls, potato salad and cole slaw, potato chips and condiments, several beverages and assorted pastries for dessert. For \$3.50 per person you can forget about cooking supper that night and just sit back and enjoy it. You will have to make reservations, though, by calling Ethel Murphy (944-7720) by June 12th (at the latest). We proudly boast that it has never rained on our picnic, but should the element tax our ingenuity this year, come anyway. We'll solve the problem somehow.

Welcome to the following...

NEW MEMBERS

Miss A. Rose Fratantuono
71 Summit Drive, Cranston, R.I. 02920
Miss Mary Fratantuono
71 Summit Drive, Cranston, R.I. 02920
Mrs. Judith Carter
Box 215, Coventry, R.I. 02816

Flea Market a great success!---Although our Flea Market was postponed a day because of rain, we suffered no loss as a goodly crowd of people showed up on Sunday to browse, buy and eat. Thanks to the efforts of all you volunteers, who baked, bought chances, contributed saleable items and staffed the various food and merchandise tables all day, we made a net profit of \$1,452.38. Unfortunately, because there were so many conflicting interests that weekend, help was at a premium, but perhaps some of us who were otherwise employed that weekend can put in our stint at the Antique Car Show in July. A special vote of gratitude should go to Tom DiPiro, "Army Armstrong and Mabel Kelley. Their "know how" and hard work pulled it all together.

You're in good standing till next January --

With the exception of a few stragglers, our membership chairman, Virginia Jenison, has rounded up the dues of most of our members. To clear up any confusion as to when dues will be due again, January is the month we start collecting - not September when the Fall season starts.

Another year, another "thanks" to our good friends, Betty and Ralph Winsor ---We can't quote a figure as this Newsletter goes to press, but we can once again thank the Winsors for sharing their lovely gardens with us and with the public. Of course we appreciate the time so many of our members gave to staff the garden, too. It certainly is one of the easiest and pleasantest of volunteer duties to sit in such a lovely setting and explain the origin of the gardens to the visiting public.

Don't forget our Antique Car Show on Sunday, July 19th ---Actually, we're not likely to let it slip your mind. Although you may not have a car to show, we will be needing baked goods for the food table, donations of wine or liquor for the raffles and that precious item, "time", that is needed of so many people to make these affairs a success. So please try to sound good natured when your phone rings again this summer. Jean and Nick Rossi have worked very hard to build this event up over the past two years. We do need the money, and we will need your participation.

Yes, we will be open during the summer --- In case you expect visiting friends this summer or know of someone who might be interested in seeing Sprague Mansion, Marguerite Smythe and her tour guides will be maintaining their regular summer schedule - Sunday and Tuesday from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. during the months of July and August.

Three new Board members --- Each year three new members are appointed to the Board of Governors to replace three members who have just completed three years of service. This rotating system keeps the Board supplied with a constant balance of new ideas and experience. The new appointees are Peggy Sharpe, Caroline Flanders and Howard Wardwell. Welcome to the group!

Curator's Corner...

THE CIRCUS IS COMING!

by

Gladys W. Brayton

The circus is said to have developed over the years from the idea of Capt. Arthur Savage of exhibiting live animals. In 1720 his showing of a "Real Lyon" had a long run in Boston. Not until December 23, 1726 was it sent on board the sloop Phoenix to the West Indies, which started the first animal show on its travels.

Early New Englanders seem to have looked askance at any form of entertainment or amusement. Ministers preached against such frivolity. To combat this attitude and soften any moral inhibitions exhibitors learned over the years to bill their shows as exhibitions of natural history and therefore educational and instructive.

In 1799 the first elephant made its debut in this country in New York, billed as the "Greatest Natural Curiosity Ever Presented to the Curious". Brought from Bengal by Capt. Jacob Crowninshield he was four years old and weighed 3,000 pounds. Named Buffon, he sold for \$10,000, surely a goodly sum in 1799.

These exhibits were welcomed wherever they were shown and were carried from city to city.

In 1834 we learn from the Providence Journal of April 30 that the Menagerie of Waring, Tufts and Co., an ancestor of the circus, gave a two-day exhibition in a meadow adjoining Dorrance St. in Providence. Admission was 25 cents for adults, half price for children. Dorrance St. was then in the country and, billed as an exhibition of natural history, it was instructive and therefore softened New England moral inhibitions against entertainment.

In 1852 Robinson and Eldred received a license to exhibit their Circus and Side Show at Cranston for one day, June 19, and paid \$15 for the same.

By this time they were emboldened to advertise, "This Way to the Big Show". Inhibitions were softening.

In 1864 Wheeler Hatch and Hitchcock's Circus and Royal Hippodrome exhibited the first automobile as an attraction and toured Rhode Island that year.

In the coming years these amusement ventures took place in Providence on Jones Hill, west of Federal Hill, where a one-ring circus pitched their tents; at Aborn St.; on the Cove lands; and in 1880 on America St. Common where Barnum's Hippodrome put on a great show with its chariot races; and still later at Messer St. near Cranston St. There were circus grounds opposite the present Home for the Aged at one time and the lot next to Grace Church once served the same purpose.

In 1886 Adam Forepaugh's New and Colossal Circus visited Providence and showed Blondin, the only horse ever trained up to that time to walk ropes or climb ladders.

Old Circus Posters in the Olneyville Times, November 27, 1908 described the Show in most pretentious language --- "There will be presented a resplendent series of sublime, moral, interesting, instructive, amusing, wonderful scenes which would appear entirely to fabulous if expressed in an advertisement... These great displays will unfold in all the loveliness and beauty of enchantment, carrying the minds of the bewildered or spellbound spectators off on the gentle wings of imagination"...etc.

Circus parades had their heyday from 1880 to 1930, gay grand and gaudy spectacles. They were said to be the grandest spectacle on the American scent, and the most powerful piece of advertising ever done. The elephants always popular in the parades were almost always female, as the male elephants proved to intractable. By 1938 Circus Parades were abandoned, partly because traffic in most places had become too heavy for them. They have been called America's Greatest Pageant. The calliope, invented by a Worcester man and meant originally to call people to church, brought up at the rear of the parade, belching white steam from its whistles, its bellow the signal that the parade was over.

Council Records in Cranston show that on September 16, 1828 James Yeaw applied to the Council for a license for Richard Hiams to open a Circus in this Town and continue the same until October 1. The license was granted --the fee \$2.00 for the Town and \$2.00 for the State.

In June 1915 Ringling's Circus, called the biggest on earth, was in Cranston to show on the 12th at the exhibition grounds there (Tate Field). Twenty acres of canvas covered the outfit and a parade more than eight miles in length from Cranston through Providence streets was advertised, featuring 50 clowns, 40 elephants, 720 horses and other animals plus a zoo housing more than 1,000 wild beasts.

In 1931 Sparks Circus was at Old Narragansett Speedway and must have been of special interest to Cranstonites for Miss Emily Lynch, a Cranston girl was advertised as having a troupe of Spitz on exhibition.

On July 5, 1941 Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus was held in the Coal Mine area of Cranston and the account said the local boys had the time of their lives helping put up tents, etc. Perhaps by chance some reader of the Corner will remember this occasion.