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Louise Oertly, Editor

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I'm not sure I like 2020 so far! In February, we lost Laurie Verge, the Director of the Surratt House Museum. Next COVID-19 struck and brought with it the worry about infection. For this reason, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission decided to close the Surratt House Museum. With the museum closed, its office and the James O. Hall Research Center are only staffed part-time. If your calls and emails are slow in being answered, this is why. This also caused the cancellation of our 2020 Lincoln Assassination Symposium, the Spring and Fall Booth Escape Route Tours, and the museum's programs for 2020 and 2021.

At this time, the museum staff and the Surratt Society's Executive Committee are trying to figure out our new normal without Laurie and living with the COVID-19 threat. We will keep you updated via the Surratt Society's website, Facebook page, and *The Surratt Courier*.

On another note, Laurie Verge's family, the Surratt Society Executive Committee, and the Surratt House Museum staff would like to thank everyone who sent expressions of sympathy and donations. They were greatly appreciated.

I'll never forget the thrill of going to the circus or carnival as a child. Everything seemed magical, and one of my childhood's prize possession was a Kewpie doll, that my

dad had won for me. I think it may still be somewhere in our attic.

At this point, you are probably thinking, what does this have to do with the Surratt House or the Lincoln assassination? There is a connection. That fateful April of 1865, the circus was in town, and the conspirators made several references to it in their statements. However, that is not the subject of the articles in this issue, but if someone would like to write on that topic, by all means do so.

When you think of the circus, the names Barnum and Bailey come to mind. (We'll ignore Ringling Brothers for now.) So who were these two men? Bob Allen provides the answer to that question in his article on P.T. Barnum. Most people have heard of this larger than life character. To answer the question of who Bailey was, I'm reprinting an April 1986 article Laurie Verge wrote for the *Courier*. They were two different men from two different generations, but their names will forever be associated with The Greatest Show on Earth.

Stay safe.

Louise Oertly, President

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Letter to the Editor

from Richard Willing

I was surprised to read Professor Walter Kirk Wood's contention that slavery was not the cause of the War. ("Did Slavery Really Cause the Civil War?" by William L. Richter in the January 2020 issue of *The Surratt Courier*) I was surprised, but the men and women who fought that War would have been astonished. They knew better.

In December 1860, six weeks after Lincoln's election, South Carolina's *Ordinance of Secession* gave as its primary reason the "increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the Institution of Slavery."¹ To maintain its domination of the Electoral College and thus the Presidency, the South needed slavery extended to the new states of the expanding nation. A series of compromises, beginning with the Constitution itself which counted a high percentage of slaves in calculating population, kept that prospect alive for the Republic's first 70 years. A Republican's election sounded its death knell.

Later, it became fashionable for promoters of the "Lost Cause" to minimize or deny slavery's primary role in bringing about the War. Not lofty enough a goal, one imagines. In 1907, no less a rebel than the "Grey Ghost," John Singleton Mosby, wrote a friend to register his "disgust" that the argument had been raised at the United Confederate Veterans reunion in Richmond.

"Now, while I think as badly of slavery as Horace Greeley did, I am not ashamed that my family were slave holders," Mosby wrote. "People must be judged by the standards of their age. If it was right to own slaves as property, it was right to fight for it. The South went to war on account of slavery."²

¹*Ordinance of Secession, State of South Carolina*, Dec 20, 1860. Accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordinance_of_Secession, Jan 26, 2020.

²Quoted in *Take Sides with the Truth, The Post War Letters of John Singleton Mosby to Samuel F. Chapman*. Edited by Peter A. Brown, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, (2007) pp. 73-74

Barnum, the Master Showman

by Bob Allen

Few figures loom as large over the 19th century as Phineas Taylor Barnum (1810–1891), showman and entrepreneur extraordinaire. And few have been chronicled, limned, scrutinized, extolled, condemned and pondered over to the extent that Barnum has. Barnum's biographers—and there have literally been dozens of

them—have had a wealth of material to work with in terms of his illustrious, and often controversial, 60-year career. As one of the dominant figures of 19th.century America, his accomplishments, like his flair for the outlandish (not to mention his love of controversy), were many. Add to that: his

personality was as colorful and larger than life as they come.

An anecdote from Eric D. Lehman's book, *Becoming Tom Thumb: Charles Stratton, P.T. Barnum and the Dawn of American Celebrity* (2013), illustrates the level of notoriety Barnum attained: "When Civil War hero and former U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant circumnavigated the globe (eight years after Tom Thumb had done the same), he found to his bemusement that Barnum's name was 'familiar to multitudes who never heard of me.'"

It's illustrative of Barnum's impact on his times and his enduring, if somewhat faded, legacy that he has been the subject of a half-dozen feature films (in which he was portrayed at various times by Wallace Beery, Burt Lancaster, Beau Bridges, Hugh Jackman and Michael Crawford), and at least a couple dozen biographies – some of them exhaustive. Among the more notable is *P. T. Barnum: America's Greatest Showman*, (1995) co-written by Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr., Philip B. Kunhardt III, and Peter W. Kunhardt of the illustrious Kunhardt Family, which also produced the landmark 1965 *Twenty Days: A Narrative in Text and Pictures of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*.

Not surprisingly, the authors draw a broad parallel between their two famous subjects: "*If Lincoln was the great moral force of the day, infusing the young democracy with a hallowed conscience, Barnum was the great liberating force, chasing out old puritanical inhibitions and letting in the light of joy. Over the course of his long lifetime, through both struggle and triumph, he came to embody an important part of the American spirit.*"

Irving Wallace, in his 1959 biography, *The Fabulous Showman*, offered a vivid 20th century perspective on Barnum's "most notorious and spectacular life:"

"[H]e would amass a fortune of four million dollars, and in so doing, become a household name in America and throughout the world. He would become the personal friend of Queen Victoria and Abraham Lincoln, of William Makepeace Thackeray and Horace Greeley. He would introduce to America the modern public museum, the popular concert, and the three-ring circus, all forerunners of vaudeville, motion pictures, and television. He would invent modern advertising and showmanship. And he would make himself an international legend. A showman, a trickster, an author, a politician, an urban developer and a PR and promotional genius, Barnum is one of the fathers of both the American museum and the three-ring circus. He's also credited with creating the first modern celebrities with the likes of the midget Tom Thumb and the Swedish opera diva Jenny Lind – both of whom he turned into household names. Over his half-century in the public eye, he also titillated the imaginations of a gullible public with such oddities and 'humbugs' as the 160-year-old slave, the Feejee Mermaid, the Siamese twins Chang and Eng (who were actually Chinese, had vastly different personalities and often quarreled), the 'man-monkey' (actually a 'microcephalic black dwarf' who spoke a language invented by Barnum himself), the Two-Headed Girl, a 'frog swallower' named English Jack, a 257-pound baby, a 45-pound living skeleton, 200 'educated white rats,' a giant crocodile billed as 'The Leviathan of Scripture' and an armless man who could paint portraits, do carpentry, play musical instruments, cut paper airplanes and serve a cup of tea with his feet more ably than most people could with their hands. He also treated the public to an array of bearded ladies, albino families, and Vantile Mack, a 254-pound, seven-year-old boy. He even staged 'fat baby contests.' (As one of his many biographers observed, "Barnum had a

curious fascination with overweight children.””

Barnum realized that his bizarre exhibits slaked the public’s thirst for the grotesque. Yet, he also believed them to be uplifting. As he once proclaimed, “Amusement [may not be] the great aim of life, but it gives zest to life and makes a grand improvement in human character.”

In his new biography, *Barnum, An American Life* (2019), Robert Wilson makes the sage observation that the word “humbug”—which has largely fallen out of usage in modern times—best explains Barnum’s relationship to the countless gullible, yet eager, customers who shelled out money to see his attractions: “As [Barnum] himself wrote in his 1865 book, *Humbugs of the World*, Webster’s definition [of *humbug*] is ‘to deceive; to impose on.’ Definitions today include the words *hoax*, *fraud*, *imposter*, *nonsense*, *trick*. Barnum’s book is a survey of such practices, intended, he said, to save the rising generation from being bamboozled by the unscrupulous But for Barnum, not all forms of humbug were hurtful; sometimes humbuggery could be harmless, even joyous.”

The son of an innkeeper and storekeeper originally from Bethel, Connecticut, the Great Showman actually launched his outlandish career in 1835, at age 25. That’s when he purchased and exhibited a blind and partially paralyzed enslaved woman named Joice Heth, whom an acquaintance had been promoting in Philadelphia as George Washington’s 161-year-old former nurse. Though slavery was by then outlawed in New York, Barnum exploited a loophole that allowed him to lease Ms. Heth for a year for \$1,000, half of which he borrowed.

The unabashed balderdash he spun to promote his human trophy was pure Barnum hokum: “*The Greatest Natural and National Curiosity in The World. JOICE HETH,*

nurse to General George Washington (the Father of our Country) is unquestionably the most astonishing and interesting curiosity in the World! She was the slave of Augustine Washington (the father of General Washington) and was the first person to put clothes on the unconscious infant Joice Heth was born in the year 1674, and has, consequently, now arrived at the astonishing age of 161 Years. She weighs but Forty-Six Pounds, and yet is very cheerful and interesting”

When Heth died in February 1836, it was determined she was no more than 80 years old. Barnum wrung the final round of profits from his deceased chattel by hosting a live autopsy of her body in a New York saloon, where spectators paid 50 cents to see Heth vivisected. Heth was the first of hundreds of human oddities (some real, most fake, and all displayed in what we would today call sideshow fashion) that Barnum exhibited starting in 1841, when he acquired an existing museum in Manhattan and extravagantly improved, expanded, and sensationalized it. By late 1846, Barnum’s New York Museum was drawing 400,000 visitors a year.

In their lavishly illustrated *P.T. Barnum, America’s Greatest Showman*, the Kunhardts convey the dynamism of Barnum at age 30, as his career began to bloom: “Here was a fast-talking, appealing, impetuous scallywag of a fellow with a lightning mind for figures, a gambler’s nerve, a hard bargainer on the one hand, but still naïve enough on the other to be easily taken in and fleeced. Here was a tall, handsome, curly-haired chap, with a lot of self-discipline and an adman’s vocabulary, a fun-loving character, who wallowed in pranks and spewed puns and jokes, a bright-eyed optimist with plenty of moxie, who was coming closer and closer to knowing the ins and outs of human nature, what caught people’s fancy, what tweaked their

curiosity, exactly what made them come to the ticket window, reach in their pockets and smack their money down.”

In an essay called “Humbugs,” Barnum, also a prolific author, defended his menagerie of truth-defying freaks and attempted to draw a fine line between an honest good-natured hoax or “humbug” and outright dishonesty: “An honest man who thus arrests public attention shall be called a ‘humbug,’ but he is not a swindler or imposter. If, however, after attracting crowds of customers by his unique displays, a man foolishly fails to give them a full equivalent for their money, they never patronize him a second time They very properly denounce him as a swindler . . . but they do not call him a ‘humbug.’”

In contemporary parlance, Barnum was drawing a distinction between “believe it or not” style oddities he served up with a tongue-in-cheek wink and a grin and outright fraud and criminal deception. In fact, in one of his books, entitled *Humbugs of the World*, he exposed tricks used by so-called spiritualists and offered \$500 to anyone who could prove that these self-proclaimed mediums were actually communicating with the dead. He even testified against a so-called “spirit photographer” (a con man who, for a hefty fee, provided his victims with photos that purported to show their lost love ones thriving in the afterlife) named William H. Mumler, who was tried for fraud.

Yet as time passed, Barnum’s own hoaxes and “humbugs” grew ever more outlandish and credulity-defying, even as the public continued to flock to see them. For instance, in 1869 the so-called Cardiff Giant was purportedly unearthed near Cardiff, New York. The allegedly petrified giant (later found to have been carved out of a block of gypsum) was displayed for a fee and drew sizeable crowds. When Barnum failed in his efforts to purchase the “giant,”

he created an exact replica and put it on display in New York City. According to one biography, his “hoax of a hoax was soon outdrawing the real (fake) thing.”

Yet another of the many weird human spectacles Barnum concocted was his so-called Wild Australian Children, whom he touted as “a distinct race hitherto unknown to civilization” and the missing link “between the orangutan and man.” They were in reality a pair of “severely retarded micro cephalic” siblings from Ohio. (Though his biographers tend to agree that Barnum didn’t coin the old adage about a sucker being born every minute, he might as well have.)

As the uncredited author of a history entitled *Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons: The Emergence of the American Museum* (1992) points out, Barnum’s style of outlandish fare was more or less what American museums trafficked in during the era bracketed by the first and eighth decades of the 19th century. The emphasis was on entertainment rather than education or enlightenment, and Barnum was very much in the forefront of this trend: “Starting about 1840, Barnum became the leading figure in this entertainment museum world. With humorous hokum and ingenious public relations, he promoted his museums’ amusement features, but somewhat neglected their scientific contributions; thus (his) Fiji Mermaid was much better known than the exotic animals brought back by his expeditions or his first-rate aquarium.”

Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons also recounts Barnum’s delight in having scientists and academics deride and debunk oddities like his Feejee Mermaid and George Washington’s 160-year-old nurse: “Barnum knew just how to play the experts and confided to a showman in Boston his delight that ‘every devil among the scientists would swear that (the mermaid’s) existence was a natural

impossibility.’ To add to the drama, he contemplated a ‘pretend lawsuit’ and imagined a scenario which would have the naturalists pay to see the specimen in order to prepare their defense against the charges. Small wonder that the relationship between showmen and naturalists degenerated to a level of mutual contempt.”

Often, if Barnum couldn’t provoke a scientist or expert into attacking the credibility of his over-the-top exhibits, he would take matters into his own hands. To stir up controversy and provoke public interest, he would sometimes write anonymous letters to the editor, denouncing his own creations as hoaxes. As he himself once quipped, “I’d prefer to be kicked rather than not noticed at all.”

Behind all the rigmarole, Barnum was above all an astute, highly literate, and ambitious businessman. He amassed a fortune, only to lose it all in a massive Bridgeport land development project, then eventually regain it again. He launched businesses. [He co-founded the Bridgeport & Port Jefferson Steamboat Company that, at last report, is still in operation.] Additionally, he worked as a newspaper editor and an urban developer (the sideline that bankrupted him before he made a dramatic mid-life comeback doing what he did best: good-naturedly hoodwinking the public).

Along the way, he found time to write, rewrite, revise, and expand at least nine different versions of his autobiography between 1855 and 1888. According to the noted scholar and critic Carl Bode, in his introduction to a 20th century reprint of one of Barnum’s books that Bode edited for republication, Barnum’s books sold more than a million copies from 1869 onward, and his memoirs “became, after the Bible, the most widely read book.”

He also dabbled in politics, serving two terms in the Connecticut State

Legislature and a stint as mayor of his hometown, Bridgeport, Connecticut, beginning in 1875. In 1867, he ran for the U.S. Congress, but was defeated by a distant cousin, William H. Barnum. At various times during his life, Barnum advocated for popular causes of the day, such as temperance, women’s suffrage, and prevention of cruelty to animals. Somewhat oddly, at least from our retrospective vantage, was his fierce advocacy as a Connecticut legislator for anti-contraception. Particularly in his later years, he became celebrated as a civic booster and philanthropist. He was instrumental in starting Bridgeport Hospital and was its first president. In his later years, he served on the board of trustees to Tufts University and was a generous benefactor to that institution. (Jumbo the Elephant, another Barnum-created novelty, remains the school mascot.) Several years after his death, a statue was placed in his honor in Bridgeport’s Seaside Park, for which Barnum had donated the land back in 1865.

Today, the town of Bridgeport is home to the impressive Barnum Museum, which opened in 1893, and is now on the National Register of Historic Places. The museum was largely Barnum’s creation. Though he did not live to see it open, he donated the land and his collection, while also providing much of the initial funding. He even approved final plans for the building just weeks before his death. The thousands of artifacts include Barnum’s top hat, Tom Thumb’s miniature furniture and a fancy miniature carriage that once belonged to Commodore Nutt, another of Barnum’s famous little people. (For more information, go online to: <https://barnum-museum.org>.)

In his later years, as he burnished his reputation as the king of hucksters and hoaxers into that of a colorful elder statesman, he socialized with the likes of U.S. Grant, Horace Greeley, Edwin Booth,

Mark Twain, editor Whitelaw Reid, poet John Greenleaf Whittier, and suffragettes Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. He was a guest at the White House during three administrations (Polk, Lincoln and Grant), and on a westward excursion he even hunted buffalo with George Armstrong Custer.

The Kunhardts aptly point out that in his own time Barnum was not held in high esteem by everyone. There were quite a few who castigated him as a huckster, opportunist, crass materialist, arch-exploiter of bad taste and worse. When Barnum published his autobiography, no less a literary figure than Mark Twain praised it. But the *British Examiner* newspaper condemned it as "trashy" and "offensive," adding that it inspired "nothing but sensations of disgust" and "sincere pity for the wretched man who compiled it." Another critic's trenchant take on Barnum's philosophy was "*Fear God and cheat your neighbor.*"

In his introduction to a 1981 reprint of Barnum's *Struggles and Triumphs: Forty Years' Recollections*, Carl Bode maintains that Barnum would have faced even more public scorn, if not for his "ostentatious Christianity and good deeds He periodically announced that he took his Bible with him wherever he went and he opened it often," Bode explained. "In a moral age he presented the picture of a very moral man, dutiful husband and father who attended church each Sunday and kept the more stylish of the Ten Commandments. In an age of sexual repression, he saw to it that no stain of sexual scandal attached itself to him. His exhibits and shows were moral Not long before he retired he said, 'I feel it my mission, as long as I live, to provide clean, moral and healthful recreation to the public.'"

Of all Barnum's biographers, the Kunhardts provide the most insight into

Barnum's life, career, and motivations during the Civil War and the tumultuous years that bookended it. He was over 50 when the war broke out, and it's an open question as to whether or not he would have enlisted in the Union Army, had he been younger.

On slavery, the central issue of the war, Barnum was unequivocal, at least for most of this life. In his autobiographies he recalled that, while touring in the South during his struggling years in the 1830s, he owned two slaves and submitted one of them to "50 lashes" after suspecting him of theft. But he later expressed regret and absolute repugnance for the institution of human servitude. "I ought to have been whipped a thousand times myself," he lamented.

It was the pro-slavery, 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act that crystalized his feelings and spurred him to quit the Democratic Party and ally himself with the new Republican Party. In 1860, he actively supported the Republican candidacy of Abraham Lincoln. In a letter to a friend, Barnum vowed that he'd willingly give his "last shirt and last dollar [and] yes, the very last drop of blood...[if] that will help preserve this nation as one and inseparable."

In August 1861, Barnum and some staunchly pro-Union colleagues, along with two omnibuses of federal soldiers home on furlough, even disrupted a pro-secessionist "peace rally" in Stepney, Connecticut. The group silenced the pro-southern speaker, and then urged Barnum to take the podium. Which he did, earning death threats from the secessionists. Later, despite Barnum's objections, some of the more ardent members of his group went on to ransack offices of the *Bridgeport Farmer*, a newspaper known for its southern sentiments.

Despite his unqualified pro-Unionism, there were limits to his support of

emancipation. He once asserted that, “if blacks were set free and there was no army to protect the whites, they would murder them and take possession of their property.”

Barnum was also very much a man of his times in so far as his promotions and exhibits catered to the widely held notion of white supremacy. Advertisements for his museums often used the words we would find repugnant today. He once promoted what he labeled an “Ethnological Congress of Slaves and Barbarous Tribes,” including a “huge assemblage of wild, savage, superstitious [and] uncivilized races.”

The Kunhardts also point out that Barnum was known for mounting “degrading displays of nonwhite races” that evidenced not only humanity’s cruelty, but also white America’s deep prejudices (as well as Barnum’s) willingness to parlay America’s racism into profits.” To his credit, Barnum did allow blacks into his New York museum, but only some of them, and only some of the time. As a notice he placed in the *New York Tribune* in 1849 elaborated: “*Notice to Persons of Color – In order to afford respectable colored persons an opportunity to witness the extraordinary attractions at present exhibited at the Museum, the Manager has determined to admit this class of people on Thursday morning next, March 1, from 8 a.m. till 1 p.m.*”

Barnum also supported the war effort (while also lining his pockets) with his entertainments. He staged a number of “patriotic dramas,” including a bowdlerized stage adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that drastically muted its anti-slavery message and, in the words of one critic, transformed its black characters into “minstrel-like comics.” He also exhibited wax figures of Union war heroes, along with relics from Fort Sumter, including a captured Confederate flag and slave shackles. Among his human

menagerie, there was even a uniformed midget he dubbed, “Ulysses Grant, Jr.” Not surprisingly, his museum was one of the buildings that Rebel agents targeted during the November 25, 1864, incendiary attack on New York City.

As Barnum biographer Arthur H. Saxon points out in his 1989 book, *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man*, Barnum’s museum served not only as a morale booster, but also as a great equalizer of class distinctions during the war years: “Rubbing elbows with farmers fresh in from the countryside, tradesmen, apprentices and laborers and ‘respectable’ citizens with their families in tow, were famous scientists like Louis Agassiz and Joseph Henry of the Smithsonian Institution, authors like Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau, eminent statesmen, religious leaders and ambassadors from abroad, and even, in 1860, the visiting Prince of Wales.”

The Kunhardts maintain that Barnum’s steadfast resolve and unbowed public profile during the war also set a positive example: “As war dragged on, in his own unique way Barnum became a kind of symbol for Northern resolve Though its proximity to well-guarded City Hall helped keep Barnum’s museum safe during the 1863 draft riots, not long afterward his buildings began to become targets of pro-Southern conspiracies. In mid-war, his museum was hit by a Confederate arsonist. And in Connecticut, at *Lindencroft* (Barnum’s stately residence), soldiers soon had to be posted around the clock. Barnum – himself now a member of a home-front vigilante organization called the ‘Prudential Committee’ –was provided with rockets to place on the roof of his Connecticut mansion and shoot off from his rooftops if he was ever attacked.”

For all that, Barnum faced a torrent of criticism in the immediate aftermath of the Lincoln assassination. While other New

York businesses and entertainments closed and draped their facades in black out of respect for the slain president, Barnum took the opposite tack. He proclaimed a “Grand Gala Week” at his museum. *The New York Times* added its voice to the chorus of public censure: “We were shocked and surprised to find that notwithstanding (the agreement among the theater owners) Barnum ventured yesterday to open his Museum. Whilst the city was humbled in prayer on one side of the street, Mr. Barnum’s players were mouthing it on the other. The various managers view the preceding with disgust and the public will look upon Mr. Barnum’s greedy haste with the contempt it merits.”

Barnum was unabashed. Just a few days later, according to Irving Wallace, in his 1959 Barnum biography, Barnum quickly hatched yet another outlandish, yet ultimately unsuccessful, scheme. “Jeff Davis was trapped in Georgia and it was falsely rumored that he had tried to escape dressed as a woman,” Wallace writes. “Barnum at once snatched at the chance to have a song, ‘Jeff in Petticoats’ sung on his stage, and then offered five hundred dollars for (Davis’s) feminine garments.”

Another of Barnum’s enduring contributions to American popular culture has at least an indirect connection to the murder of the 16th President. Keep in mind there were those in Lincoln’s inner circle – Secretary of War Edwin Stanton immediately comes to mind – who shared a widely held a puritanical moral prejudice against the theater as an ungodly place, a font for the corruption of public taste and, above all, a place not fit for a president of the United States to set foot. The Kunhardts point out that, in the aftermath of a deadly 1812 fire in the Richmond Theater that killed 70 patrons, a pamphlet circulated condemning the theater as “an expiring evil,” then posing the rhetorical question of, “Who in the theater would be willing to

close the career of mortality in the very act of displeasing his maker?” Henry Ward Beecher went a step further, again denouncing the theater as “an expiring evil.” He cautioned all morally upright young men to avoid it, just as they should eschew card-playing, boxing, circus performers and female singers.

Even though this prejudice still lingered at the time of the Lincoln assassination, Barnum, with his many immensely popular promotions, exhibits and theatricals, set out to change it, and throughout the ensuing years he in large part succeeded.

Yet even at the height of his financial success and public influence, Barnum weathered devastating setbacks. In July 1865, his museum was reduced to rubble in a fire of unknown causes. True to form, by that November he had rallied and reopened for business at a new location. But in March 1868, his “new” museum was also destroyed by fire. After that, he retired from the museum business, although the next lucrative chapter in his illustrious future, as one of the creators of the three-ring circus, was still some years ahead of him.

In 1883, Barnum was invited by Thomas Edison to record a succinct message for posterity on Edison’s newly minted phonograph. Barnum obliged: “*I thus address the world through the medium of the latest wonderful invention, so that my voice, like my great show, will reach future generations, and be heard centuries after I have joined the great, and as I believe, happy majority.*”

It was in November 1890, that Barnum suffered a stroke and apparently realized his days were numbered. The following March, he requested that *The New York Times* do him the favor of prematurely printing his obituary, so he could read it. The paper complied, and he approved: “*P.T. Barnum held no exalted official*

station, neither was he eminent in the world of politics, literature, science or art He was only a showman. Yet there was [no more famous] man of his time. For fifty years he was never lost to view. Through his search for curiosities, his name became familiar ... in far parts of the earth. No man was so well known to the youth and adults of America. His 'Greatest Show on Earth' was a collection of the wonderful, the curious, and the pleasing. It grew from Barnum's brain alone. This is his eulogy, that he was a public-spirited citizen, he furnished delights to millions, he added to the sum of childhood's and of human joy."

Within the next month, on April 7, 1891, he died at age 81.

A.H. Saxon, in *Barnum: The Legend and the Man*, captures Barnum's legacy and enduring legend as vividly as anyone has: "Through the ideal combination of heredity, ambition, and to some extent luck, in a little over a decade, Barnum rose to become America's foremost caterer to the public's love of amusement, which he himself expanded and in large part defined at a time when the Puritans' grip on the nation's conscience was finally relaxing. He was, as his pastor, Lewis B. Fisher once remarked, a genius in his own way who seemed almost divinely called to become a showman; and among his greatest shows over fifty years' running was Barnum himself. 'Prince of Humbugs,' 'The Children's Friend,' 'The

World's Greatest Showman' – epithets he or others attached to him roll on and on."

Robert Wilson more or less seconds this opinion in *Barnum: An American Life*: "He came to represent much of what was most admirable about his young country, and he did so with a sense of humor and a joy of living that is rare in today's public figures. He led a rich, event-filled life, one indeed characterized by both struggles and triumphs. His life is well worth knowing and celebrating."

As a lighthearted end note, there's another historical tidbit that vividly exemplifies Barnum's lifelong penchant for flamboyance and attention-grabbing. Shortly after the Brooklyn Bridge opened in 1883, rumors spread that it was structurally unsound. At one point these rumors sparked a human stampede on the bridge that left a dozen people dead. Barnum offered the bridge's owners \$5,000 to let him parade his circus animals across it, as a publicity stunt. Initially they turned him down, but they changed their minds after the accident. So, on the evening of May 17, 1884, he marched 21 elephants and 17 camels over the magnificent new structure from Manhattan to Brooklyn. The legendary Jumbo was in the procession, as was "Toung Taloung," a white elephant Barnum had recently acquired from Thailand.

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Who Was P. T. Barnum? (2019) by Kirsten Anderson

Elephants and Quaker Guns

by Laurie Verge

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That legendary showman, P.T. Barnum, is credited with the statement that “Clowns and elephants are the pegs on which to hang a circus.” Now, you are probably wondering what the circus has to do with the Surratts’ world. Actually, the circus was in town that fateful spring of 1865, and several references to it are made in the statements given by the conspirators. Also, the world of clowns and elephants was very much a part of Washington life in the mid-19th century, as chronicled in a charming little book, *Elephants and Quaker Guns*, by Jane Chapman Whitt. Originally published in 1966, this work was updated and re-issued by Vanamere Press and outlines the history of a town just outside Washington, D.C., a town whose history is closely related to the wonderful American institution, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus. The town? Bailey’s Crossroads in Northern Virginia.

In her chronicle, Ms. Whitt starts “at the beginning” with a gentleman named Hachaliah Bailey (1775-1845), a young New York drover headquartered at the Bull’s Head Tavern in the Bowery. In 1796, he spotted an elephant, which had just arrived from China, the first such beast to come to America. Bailey immediately bought her and named her Old Bet. Bet went with Bailey on his many cattle drives and was exhibited to the public at ten cents a head. Hachaliah then began to acquire bears, monkeys, horses, and dogs, and to work up animal acts.

In the 1820s, Mr. Bailey became a customer of the family of young Phineas T.

Barnum. They owned a fruit and confectioner’s shop until financial disaster struck. Bailey hired the young man to run the front office for his now-popular circus headquartered at 37 Bowery, under the name of an “Educational Show.” The great animal trainer and rider, Van Amburgh, was hired; and the circus continued to grow. Tragedy struck, when Old Bet was shot by a farmer’s young son. The grieving Bailey would immortalized his pet by having a gilded statute of her placed atop a granite shaft in front of a beautiful inn that he was building in Somers, New York. The establishment was named The Elephant Hotel, and soon became renowned for the many celebrities who frequented it. The hotel/museum and statue still stand today.

Bailey continued to expand his circus and to attract investors. In 1835, 130 showmen, museum owners, and businessmen met in The Elephant Hotel and formed the Association of the Zoological Institute headquartered still at 37 Bowery with P.T. Barnum heading the offices. [Note: It was in this same year, 1835, that P.T. Barnum made his own first successful venture in showmanship. He exhibited Joice Heth, who had been living in Philadelphia claiming she was the nurse of George Washington, and that she was 161 years old.]

Clowns, acrobats, equestrians, and animal trainers were added, and the shows toured the U.S. and Latin America. Washington, D.C., was a regular stop on the circus’ itinerary. The earliest location in the

city was Brown's Amphitheatre at 4 ½ Street near the U.S. Capitol.

In the early years, Danbury, Connecticut, had been the best-known winter headquarter for circuses; but by 1837, Hachaliah Bailey decided that a country place for animal training and winter headquarters was needed in the Washington area. In December of that year, he purchased over 500 acres, known as the Crossroads, around the crossing of two important highways in Virginia—Leesburg Pike and Columbia Turnpike. This was the pathway to all points north, south, and west. And, it soon became part of the circus world.

In 1843, Hachaliah deeded the property to his daughter-in-law, Mariah, who arrived with her husband, Lewis, and the children to develop the estate. Both Mariah and Lewis were trained as bareback riders. At the Crossroads, they moved into a handsome old colonial mansion known as Maury (or Moray in some records). Lewis continued the family business of cattle raising and became the milk supplier for Washington's famous Willard Hotel. While Hachaliah spent some time at the Crossroads, his last months were spent at The Elephant Hotel in New York, where he died in 1845.

The facilities at the Virginia home were expanded. An old inn was enlarged to handle circus personnel, barns for the animals, and restraining pens were outfitted. A circular riding ring was the site for hippodrome training, and, after 1850, calliope music was added, along with fiddlers, to accustom animals to cues. Mariah turned the old mansion into a showplace, compete with formal gardens, and the Bailey families began to merge with or marry into other circus troupes, including Hachaliah's nephew, George F. Bailey, who merged with the great Aaron Turner Circus.

Then came the Civil War. Because of its location, the Crossroads was in the hub of both Union and Confederate activities. On November 20, 1861, Bailey's Crossroads hosted the Grand Review by General McClellan upon his replacing General Winfield Scott. President Lincoln, the Cabinet, a host of foreign dignitaries, about 75,000 soldiers, and at least 75,000 spectators crowded into the area to see the pageantry. Mariah Bailey's fences were torn down to construct reviewing stands; her lake was drained by the soldiers and the fish used for food; and the old inn and circus tents stood ready to shelter the crowds. At nearby Munson Hill, a small detachment of Confederate troops were discovered by Union troops; and the pageantry was briefly delayed. Witnessing it from Munson's home was Julia Ward Howe. It served as the inspiration for "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." When the festivities were over, massive traffic snarl jammed the roads back to Washington. Family folklore maintains that President and Mrs. Lincoln spent the night with the Baileys.

Soon the Crossroads became one big army camp. Most of the Zoological Institute circuses were out on tour when the war commenced, and the war disrupted the seasonal visits by circuses. It also caused even greater financial problems later. Phineas T. Barnum, however, had become quite rich from his promotional tours with Jennie Lind and tiny Tom Thumb. In the 1870s, he began acquiring various shows of the Zoological Institute, culminating in 1875 with the purchase of the George F. Bailey Circus. The Barnum and Bailey Circus became "The Greatest Show on Earth."

And what of Bailey's Crossroads? Barnum quickly realized that receipts were greatest in the cities and that the railroad was the best means of transportation. The old winter headquarters at the junction of land routes was not needed. Beautiful

Maury became larger, when the two long wings of the Crossroads Inn were added (it now totaled 100 rooms!), and it became a popular boarding home for Washington residents looking for summer and weekend diversion. After Mariah Bailey's death in 1896, however, it was allowed to deteriorate, finally being consumed by fire in 1943. Little remains to remind one of the days before the Civil War.

P.T. Barnum may well be the best remembered circus manager, but it was Hachaliah Bailey, who gave him his start, and it was the several Bailey circuses, which

formed the nucleus for The Greatest Show on Earth.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The last performance of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus was in 2017. According to a statement they issued, their closure was due to a combination of high operating costs, steeply declining ticket sales after the retirement of the elephants, and cruelty to animal concerns. The Greatest Show on Earth is no more.]