



Circus and Allied Arts Collection

The Special Collections and Rare Book Room, located in room 613 on Floor 6 of Milner Library, maintains regular open hours during the fall and spring semesters on days when classes are in session. Summer hours may vary. For the latest listing of hours, please consult our website <http://www.library.ilstu.edu/page/396>. Other times are available by advance appointment. The telephone numbers are (309) 438-7450 and (309) 438-2871.

Milner Library's Circus and Allied Arts Collection is one of the largest and best special collections of its type in existence. While the major emphasis of the collection is upon circus, it also includes related arts such as carnivals, carousels, conjuring, music halls, Wild West shows, and vaudeville.

History of the Circus and Allied Arts Collection

The Circus and Allied Arts Collection began in 1955 when Eleanor Welch—Milner's Library Director at the time—decided to document the important role the circus has played in Bloomington-Normal's history. Beginning with the "Flying Fishers" in the 1870s, Bloomington produced dozens of well-known circus aerialist acts and became a popular winter training location for circus performers.

Through numerous purchases and donations, Milner's Circus and Allied Arts Collection has grown from approximately 2,100 items in 1963 to its current size of over 100,000 items. Instrumental to the growth of the collection has been the acquisition of outstanding private collections such as those of Harold T. Ramage, Walter Scholl, Sverre O. Braathen, Jo Van Doveren, Charles H. Tinney, Everett W. Richey, Frank Ball, William Houk and Jack Atkinson.

In 1976 *A Descriptive and Bibliographic Catalog of the Circus and Related Arts Collection at Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois* was published. Written and compiled by Robert Sokan, Milner Library's Special Collections Librarian from 1969 to 1987, this catalog remains an excellent overview of the core of the Collection.

Access to the Collection

Book and periodical holdings in the Circus and Allied Arts Collection have been cataloged and will appear in the Milner Online catalog. The other holdings of the collection (circus posters, photographs, videorecordings, route books, correspondence, etc.) are not cataloged, so Special Collections staff will need to work closely with researchers wanting to use them.

All items in the Circus and Allied Arts Collection are non-circulating and to be used only within Special Collections. Depending upon the age and condition of an individual item, photocopying may be allowed, but only at the discretion of the Special Collections personnel.

Book Holdings

The over 6,000 book items within the Circus and Allied Arts Collection make it one of the most comprehensive and in-depth circus and allied arts book collections anywhere. Materials are primarily in English, but most of the major European languages are represented as well.

Circus Periodicals

Special Collections maintains subscriptions to most of the major circus periodicals, including *The White Tops*, *Bandwagon*, *Circus Report*, *King Pole* (British), and *Le Cirque* (French). Milner Library's Online Catalog reflects holdings for each periodical title. Complete or nearly complete runs exist for *The White Tops* (1927 - present), *Bandwagon* (1957 - present), and *Circus Report* (1973 - present).

Circus Posters and Prints

There are approximately 1,500 posters contained in the Circus and Allied Arts Collection. These include full-sheets, half-sheets, show cards, streamers, and heralds. Dates of the posters range from the 1870s to the present, with the bulk of the posters dating from the 1930s and 1940s. Except for more recent acquisitions, the posters have been photographed and put on a CD-ROM .

Circus Photographs and Slides

At approximately 50,000 items, photographs and slides compose one of the largest areas within the Circus and Allied Arts Collection. Included are professional studio portraits of performers, a number of the famous Kelyt photographs, and many photographs taken by circus fans. All aspects of circus and related arts (i.e., magic, carnivals, fairs, Wild West shows, etc.) are covered. Some photographs have been indexed, others are in photo albums, and some are framed and on display. Anyone wanting to use the photographs or slides should contact the Special Collections personnel in advance.

Circus Video Recordings

Contained within the collection are numerous video recordings. These include professionally-produced videos of circus performances as well as videos of feature films which use a circus theme or background. Videos which have been cataloged are listed in the online catalog, and uncataloged items may be located by Special Collections staff. A combination TV/VHS player is available in Special Collections.

Circus-related Music

Included in the collection are numerous band scores and recordings, as well as photographs of circus bands, band masters, and musicians. Most of these items are uncataloged, but may be accessed by Special Collections personnel when contacted in advance. CDs may be listened to in Special Collections, and staff may allow LPs to be used in the nearby Media Resource Center.

Couriers, Route Books and Circus Programs

The collection includes a large group of circus route books ranging in age from the late 1890s to the present, with the majority of them dating from the period of 1900 to 1960. While the emphasis of the route books is upon the Ringling Brothers and Barnum shows, several other circuses are included. There are also numerous circus couriers and programs in the collection. Again the emphasis is upon the Ringling Brothers and Barnum shows with the dates ranging as far back as the 1870s to the present.

Gamma Phi Circus

Special Collections houses a partial archive of Illinois State University's Gamma Phi Circus. Included in this collection are photographs, programs, posters, correspondence, rosters, scrapbooks, and various files. The Gamma Phi materials are not fully indexed, so anyone wanting to use them should contact the Special Collections personnel in advance.