

The Flatfoot Party and the Zoological Institute

by Stuart Thayer

The "cover story" in the *New York Clipper* of March 10, 1883 was of Rufus Welch, then dead some twenty-seven years. Among the persons quoted in the article was the former equestrian and circus-owner Charles J. Rogers (1817-1895), then living in retirement in Philadelphia. In a résumé of Welch's career, as he remembered it, Rogers made this statement:

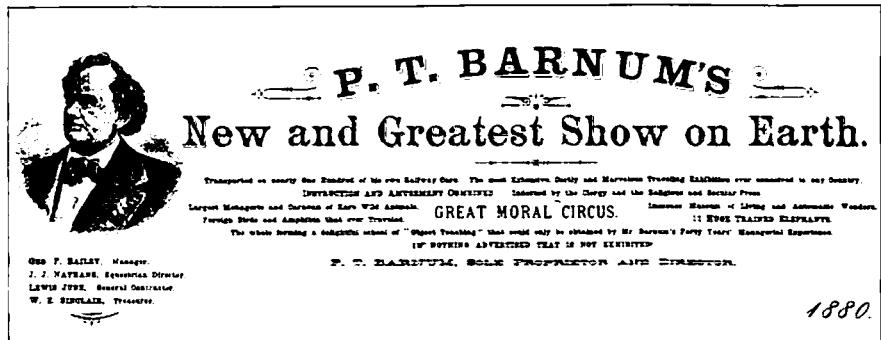
The Zoological Institute, so called, was owned by the Flatfoot party. June, Titus, Angevine & Co. were the principals of the monopoly, whose object was to force all menageries and circuses to sell out and take stock in this company for payment.

It is our opinion that this statement is the source for all later comment by circus historians and the cause of their misunderstandings as to the nature and relationship between the Zoological Institute and the group known as the "Flatfoots." The names of the two groups are familiar to anyone interested in show history and have been used interchangeably over the years. However, they were two separate groups of showmen. This monograph is the result of research into the question of how this error was compounded by subsequent commentators.

We should first point out that menagerie history, as separate from circus history, has not received much attention from historians. The genre was rather short-lived and ended in a period in which even circus history, until recently, was almost ignored. Using an arbitrary designation of the menagerie as being the exhibition of more than two species of animals we can date its beginnings as 1813. By 1839 the circus had assimilated the separate menagerie for the most part, and by the time of the death of James Raymond in 1854 it was almost gone. Excepting a very few companies, most notably Van Amburgh & Co., the menagerie was absorbed by the circus at Raymond's death and has been an adjunct to the arena ever since.

It is with the Zoological Institute that most researchers familiarity with early menageries begins. Because of their extensive newspaper advertising and use of large pictorial posters the Institute left behind the kind of artifacts that attract attention and therefore welds the name to the mind.

In an attempt at monopoly, just as Rogers said, the leading menagerie



While not generally associated with the Flatfoots, the 1880 Barnum show was the last circus run by that group. This letter-head dating from 1880 is in black, except

and circus proprietors capitalized the Zoological Institute in January, 1835. Monopoly of a business has always been a thoroughly popular idea, but in the early nineteenth century it was still a legal possibility. The public in general opposed monopolies because their formation tended to increase prices artificially. State legislatures were loath to legalize the formation of corporations because they tended to become monopolies. In addition, the limited personal liability inherent in corporate structure seemed morally lax. In any case, several existing menageries were combined and cash investments accepted until the Zoological Institute had a capitalization of \$329,325.00. A board of directors took charge of the assets, dividing them into thirteen shows of various sizes, setting the routes for each and receiving reports from their managers once the season began. Only five shows were on the road in 1835 that were not affiliated with the Institute and these were circuses; no menageries other than those controlled by the monopoly were in operation.

C.J. Rogers went on to comment, "These would-be monopolists were successful for a time, but failed before all the sheep were driven into the fold. This failure occurred, I think, in 1837." C.H. Day, writing in *Collier's Weekly*, March 14, 1903, confirms this, stating, ". . . a combine which went amiss by the unpropitious arrival of the memorable panic of 1837." The words "Zoological Institute" appear in various show titles for several seasons after 1837, but there is no evidence that the association itself was still viable. The auction in Som-

ers, New York in August, 1837 of two menageries and one circus would seem to indicate the end of the Zoological Institute.

Rogers' use of the term "Flatfoot" is the earliest thus-far located. The only major circus history published prior to his statement was T. Alston Brown's "History of the Amphitheatre and Circus" which ran serially in the *New York Clipper* in 1860-61. Brown does not refer to the Flatfoots by name and mentions the Zoological Institute in such a way as to indicate that he really didn't know what it was. He speaks of Rufus Welch as selling out to a company "called the Zoological Institute." Welch, of course, was one of the members of the Institute.

The Flatfoots were said to be named from an incident in which a rival show was informed "we put our foot down flat and shall play New York, so watch out," or words to that effect. Putting one's foot down flat was a colloquialism of the pre-Civil War era implying insistence. "I put my foot down," is a phrase still in use and connotes a limitation of some sort.

The earliest explanation of the origin of the term Flatfoot seems to lie in an interview with George Fox Bailey that was printed in the *Dramatic News Circus Special* of 1895. In it he revealed that Raymond & Waring had planned a tour of New York and were greeted with the above warning from some member of an opposition show. Earl Chapin May used Bailey's description in *The Circus from Rome to Ringling* (1932) and added, "Within a few days of this dictum from the syndicate the circus world dubbed

them 'the Flatfoots,' which they retained until 1880, the longest-lived and most effective syndicate in circus history."

Since both Bailey and May (the latter probably by derivation) say that it was Raymond & Waring that the warning was presented to we can date the existence of the Flatfoots as being no earlier than 1835. This was the year in which Raymond and Waring first had their names combined in a show.

George F. Bailey (1818-1903), son-in-law of Aaron Turner, went on to say, "I am the only survivor of the Flatfoots, originally comprising Lewis Titus, John June, Jesse Smith and Thad and Gerard Crane." Titus, June and Smith were partners in June, Titus, Angevine & Co. (along with Caleb S. Angevine), successors to the National Menagerie of 1832 and 1833. The Cranes were long in the business, going back as far as 1820. The Zoological Institute was formed, as we said, in 1835 and Raymond & Ogden and H. and E. Waring's respective menageries were combined into one of the Institute menageries, the first linking of their names. The principals of June, Titus, Angevine & Co. also combined their show with another for Institute purposes. James Raymond, Hiram Waring, Lewis B. Titus and Caleb S. Angevine were all directors of the Zoological Institute. It would not seem likely that the Flatfoots would warn Raymond & Waring away from New York when they were serving together, therefore the confrontation must have occurred after the collapse of the Institute, no earlier than 1838.

June, Titus, Angevine & Co., the partnership containing at least three of the five Flatfoots, went out of business at the end of 1842 (incidentally, selling their elephants to James Raymond). Lewis Titus had taken Isaac Van Amburgh to England in the fall of 1839 for a six-year stay. Upon their return in late 1845 the surviving Flatfoots took Van Amburgh & Co. on the road. This series of events would seem to indicate, then, that the warning to Raymond & Waring can be placed somewhere between 1838 and 1842.

Of those years Raymond & Waring played New York State only in 1840 and 1841, which may or may not mean we can close the gap even more. The problem, of course, is that we don't know whether or not Raymond & Waring ignored the warning. What we do have, however, is the distinct separation of the Flatfoots and the Zoological Institute.

We assume that C.H. Day in the *Collier's* article based his research on C.J. Rogers when he said that June, Titus and Angevine were Flatfoots and that they "attempted at one time to monopolize the profitable business in a



Newspaper ad from the Baltimore branch of the Zoological Institute. From the *Erie (Pa.) Gazette* of 13 August 1835. Pfening Archives.

showmen of upper Westchester County [who he identifies on page 28 as John J. June, Lewis B. Titus, Caleb S. Angevine and Jeremiah Crane] stock selling seemed to promise more profits . . . than touring with a caravan . . . they acquired a rolling show, grandiloquently entitled 'The Zoological Institute.' "This recitation is erroneous, of course, and indicative of May's poor research methods. He has confused the two groups, treating them as one. Gerard (Jerry) Crane is the man he meant by Jeremiah Crane.

In his book *A History of the Circus in America* (1959) George Chindahl was careful to say, "the active managers [of the Zoological Institute] are reputed to have acquired the title, 'the Flatfoots.' " He might well have stated it this way because of the obvious lack of accuracy in May's work.

Richard E. Conover in *The Fielding Bandchariots* (1969), says on page 4, "the Zoological Institute, that association of showmen colloquially known as the Flatfoots . . ." Thus he takes his place at the end of this long line of historians whose assumption that the Zoological Institute and the Flatfoots were one and the same, all of it begun by C.J. Rogers' statement. It would appear that Rogers should have known the truth. A one-time partner of Nathan Howes, active in Institute shows and later co-owner of the firm of Spalding & Rogers, he was certainly at the center of the circus business of his time. It may be that he simply paid no attention.

As for the Flatfoots surviving in business until 1880. Bailey explains that, "The sons of these parties [i.e., June, Smith, Titus and the Cranes] and John J. Nathans and myself became successors later on." Bailey joined with Avery Smith (son of Jesse), John June (brother of the Junes), Nathans, Richard Sands and C.G. Quick to operate G.F. Bailey's Circus and later (without Quick and Sands) P.T. Barnum's Circus. In 1881 these later Flatfoots gave way to Cooper & Bailey as Barnum's partners and Bailey then retired. He was by then, as he stated, the only survivor of the Flatfoots.

The Zoological Association's Menagerie and Aviary, *CELEBRATED*

WILL be exhibited in Erie, on Friday, September 4th, 1835 —

Hours of exhibition from 1 to 4, P.M.

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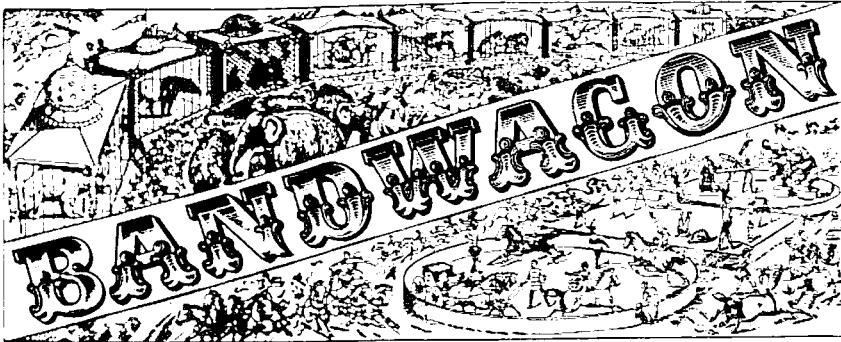
Aug. 6, 1835

combine . . ." They were, of course, only part of the attempt.

Earl Chapin May sets out a scenario that we think he borrowed from Day. On page 36 of the Dover reprint of his book he states, "to the four young

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The cover of the program used on the Van Amburg Show during the 1908 season

is shown on our cover. Note that the title is misspelled as "Amberg." It is correctly spelled in the insert used for the March 30-31 and April 1, 1908 stands. The original cover is printed in one color, a light red. Original in the Pfening Archives.

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