

ONE SHEET

By Stuart Thayer

The four animal species that have intrigued menagerie historians are the elephant, the hippopotamus, the rhinoceros and the giraffe. The elephant has intrigued everyone, owners, performers, customers, the lot. Something about these huge, usually docile animals fascinates human beings. "Seeing the elephant" is still an event, as witness circus crowds or zoo-goers of today. The other three beasts, being wild animals, somewhat rare and demanding of more care than elephants, while spectacular in the early days, do not have the empathy elephants have. Elephants, to the historian, are not a difficult problem in terms of tracing them, because of the habit of giving them names. The others, however, were never so acceptable to their keepers or their owners that they needed to be personalized. Also, since they were almost universally caged, there was no need to talk to them, as one does to a led animal, and with no need to address them, no need for a name.

All this sounds a bit belabored, but the point is that tracing individual hippos or rhinos or giraffes is complicated by the fact that there is nothing to distinguish them one from another in the materials a researcher makes use of. We must make assumptions about them that are more common sense than fact. As an example, if the same show advertises a giraffe two years in succession one must assume that it is the same animal in both seasons. That this may not be factually correct is obvious. It's what we call faith.

In the November-December, 1968 issue of *Bandwagon* Richard J. Reynolds published a very fine article on the rhinoceros in the early circus. In the January-February, 1973 issue of the same journal ~~J.~~ F. Polacsek contributed a letter clarifying the history of some of these beasts in the United States between 1830-1835. This writer now offers his interpretation of the early exhibition of these animals.

Reynolds writes that the first rhinoceros to be exhibited in this country was at Peale's Museum in New York in October, 1826. He quotes R.W.G. Vail as his source. I believe this was a stuffed specimen because there was no reference in the advertising to its being alive. Such a distinction was almost invariably made, especially by museums, because it was their ordinary practice to display stuffed animals and birds. When they offered a living animal, they identified it as such.

Reynolds then identifies the second rhinoceros to be shown in America as the one that was at 350 Broadway in June and July of 1829. I have not been able to find any advertising concerning such an event in 1829, but a rhinoceros was exhibited at 350 Broadway in June and July of 1830 (Odell, III, p. 476) and I believe it is the one mentioned next.

In May, 1830 a rhinoceros was imported into Boston and was put on exhibition almost immediately at Washington Gardens. It was said to be about five years-old and to have been captured as an infant. A pair of monkeys and an ichneumon were exhibited with it and we believe this was the beginning of the firm of June, Titus & Angevine. Polacsek says that this rhino was shown by the American National Caravan in 1830, but we differ with this as we do not find the ~~no~~ under that title until 1831. This rhinoceros and his three consorts appear in ads in New York, as mentioned, in Philadelphia in September and October and in Washington in December and in all those places the heading of the ads is The Greatest Natural Curiosity Ever Exhibited in America.

In October, 1830 the ship *Georgian* brought the next rhinoceros to America, the one both Reynolds and Polacsek say was imported by a Doctor Burrows into Philadelphia. It was a three year-old animal weighing 1,590 pounds. It was put on exhibition at 48 South Fifth Street in Philadelphia from December 9 to January 3 (*Poulson's Daily American Advertiser*, December 9, et subs.). In January, 1831 it was sold at auction (*National Intelligencer*, January 10) and in March was again on exhibit in Philadelphia. By July 27 this rhino was with a menagerie in Painesville, Ohio which Polacsek calls the American Menagerie, but which we have seen advertised only as the New and Rare Collection of Living Animals. This would seem to be the Raymond & Ogden show.

Meanwhile, the first rhino was on the road with the American National Caravan (June, Titus & Angevine) during 1831

In 1832 the American National Caravan went under the title National Menagerie and sometimes Grand National Menagerie. It was still June, Titus & Angevine's show and carried the elephants Romeo and Juliet in addition to the rhinoceros.

The New and Rare Collection of Living Animals (Raymond & Ogden) had no elephant until December, 1832 when Hyder Ali was imported and joined them in Charleston.

Each of these shows had a keeper who entered the lion's den in the 1833 season. The National Menagerie had a Mister Roberts from London, Raymond & Ogden (not using that title) had a Mister Gray. It is our impression that Isaac Van Amburgh was Roberts' cage boy. Both rhinos were present as were the elephants.

Eighteen thirty-four saw June, Titus & Angevine and Raymond & Ogden use the proprietor's name as titles. From this year forward this was the practice, and researchers are grateful for it. It was also the year in which these and two other menageries brought out bandwagons for what seems to be the initial year for such equipment. These sudden and shared innovations make one wonder if there was not some off-season consultation or even common ownership between these shows. The Zoological Institute didn't come into being until January, 1835, but we may have found some pre-corporate cooperation in these events.

Van Amburgh was with June, Titus & Angevine in 1834, his debut season as a trainer. Roberts was mauled by a tiger in Connecticut in late October, 1833 and this possibly precipitated Van Amburgh's promotion. Of Gray we find no notice after 1833.

The third rhino to be imported into this country arrived in December, 1834 and was eventually assigned to Purdy, Welch & Company. The Zoological Institute agreement was signed by most of the major menagerie proprietors in January, 1835. The various shows went out that year titled something near to The Association's Celebrated Menagerie and Aviary and subtitled Zoological Institute of whatever city they represented.

The three rhinos were with the Zoological Institute of New York (June, Titus & Angevine); of Baltimore (Raymond, Ogden, Waring & Company) and of Philadelphia (Purdy, Welch & Company).

In June, 1835 the ship *Susan* docked in Boston bearing a shipment of animals among which was a large, male rhino (*Kennebec Journal*, June 3). This one was consigned to MacOmber, Welch & Company, the Boston branch of the Zoological Institute. They had made a circuit of Connecticut while awaiting the *Susan* and returned to Boston to receive the shipment and went out again.

Thus, we have four of the beasts on the road in America in 1835. In John Polacsek's letter he lists six rhinos in that year, but he has overcounted, which we should demonstrate.

His No. 1 he places with the New York unit and says it came into Boston in 1830, which is correct. Number 2 he attributes to Doctor Burrows and says it showed in Pittsburgh in 1831. Correct again, this is the Raymond & Ogden animal.

He says No. 3 had been with J.R. and William Howe & Company in 1834 when it died. Richard Flint, in an address before the CFA convention in 1972, mentioned an appraisal of the 1834 Howe show and he, too, says it had a rhino. I have advertisements for this menagerie for eight stands beginning in Washington, D.C. in March and ending in Poughkeepsie, New York in November and in none of them is there any mention of a rhinoceros. On the basis of this evidence it is my belief that the show had no such beast.

Polacsek's No. 4 he places on Raymond & Ogden in 1834 and 1836, so he assumes its existence in 1836. It is the one he also calls No. 2. His No. 5, with MacOmber & Welch, we mentioned as arriving on the *Susan* in June, 1835. His No. 6 was with the Philadelphia branch, the one imported in December, 1834.

At the end of his piece Polacsek mentions a possible seventh rhino as being with June, Titus & Angevine. This is his No. 1 on the New York unit of the Zoological Institute.

Beyond 1835 the picture is not at all clear. It became the custom of the Zoological Institute to winter one of the menageries in each major city, but in some cases two shows would winter together. This led to having two New York units, for instance, and to the consequent difficulty in keeping the animals separated in the research task. Reynolds and Polacsek have already demonstrated their ability to make the necessary effort to accomplish the requisite reconstruction of the history of rhinoceroses. We hope they will continue at it.