

**Richard Shipley (1903-1973)**, like many young people of his day, became captivated with the circus. Not only did many circuses regularly pass through Bloomington-Normal, but many circus acts and aerialists were born and bred in the area. When he was about 16 years of age, Shipley ran off to join the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey circus and worked with them for about a season. For unknown reasons, Shipley returned home to Bloomington and spent 20 years working with Boylan Brothers Ice Cream. However, he was drawn back to the circus life, this time working with elephants, which were regarded as the “chief attractions” by many circuses.<sup>1</sup> Shipley then spent the next 28 years working with “Those Ponderous, Loveable, Hulking Harlequines of the Animal Kingdom,”<sup>2</sup> which he trained to do a multitude of tricks to the delight of countless thousands of people across the nation who attended the circuses he worked at each and every year.

Richard F. Shipley was born in Bloomington on November 22, 1903.<sup>3</sup> He was one of thirteen children born to Charles and Florence (Butler) Shipley.<sup>4</sup> A few years before Richard’s birth, his father had moved the family from their home at 802 N. Linden Street in Normal to Bloomington when he took a position as a brakeman at the Chicago and Alton Railroad Shops on February 16, 1900.<sup>5</sup> Prior to this move, Charles worked as a clerk at G.G. Johnson’s Grocery Store located at 112 North Street. The family first settled at 1202 N. Lee Street after they moved to Bloomington.<sup>6</sup> By 1907 Charles was now working as a switchman for the Chicago and Alton Railroad and the family was living at 603 W. Graham Street. In 1909 they were living at 611 W. Empire Street.<sup>7</sup> In 1911 Charles took a position as a driver for Peoples Bus Line and Livery Company and had moved to 608 Scott Street. The family lived there for about six years and by 1919, was living at 1008 N. Center Street.<sup>8</sup> In 1920 they moved to 907 W. Locust Street, which remained the family home for many years to come.<sup>9</sup> Charles continued to work for the Chicago and Alton Railroad off and on until about 1932 when it appears he retired.<sup>10</sup>

Little information is known about Richard Shipley’s early life. His family was Roman Catholic and attended several of the local parish churches. In May 1914 Shipley received his first communion and confirmation at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Bloomington. Bishop Edmund Dunne of Peoria conferred the honors on all the participating children. According to *The Pantagraph*, this was one of the “largest communion and confirmation classes in recent years.”<sup>11</sup> Shipley and his siblings also attended the local Catholic schools. Richard attended St. Mary’s School in 1912,<sup>12</sup> but according to the 1940 United States Federal Census, he did not continue

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<sup>1</sup> M.W. Meier. “How Circus Elephants Are Trained,” *Modern Mechanics*, July 1931, p. 59,

<http://blog.modernmechanix.com/how-circus-elephants-are-trained/>, Date Accessed July 25, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> *1949 Route Book for the Clyde Beatty Circus*, p. 13. Illinois State University’s Special Collections, Milner Library.

<sup>3</sup> “Circus Animal Trainer Richard Shipley dies,” *The Pantagraph*, August 27, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> “Mrs. Florence Shipley,” *The Pantagraph*, September 17, 1955.

<sup>5</sup> “Normal News: Mr. Charles Shipley,” *The Pantagraph*, February 16, 1900; *1899 Bloomington-Normal City Directory*.

<sup>6</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory 1902*, p. 485; *Bloomington-Normal City Directory 1905*, p. 485.

<sup>7</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory 1907*, p. 465; *Bloomington-Normal City Directory 1909*, p. 545.

<sup>8</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directories 1911-1917*, various pages.

<sup>9</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory 1920*, p. 568; “Charles W. Shipley Dies at His Home,” *The Pantagraph*, July 31, 1940.

<sup>10</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directories 1920-1932*, various pages.

<sup>11</sup> “Confirmation Class at Holy Trinity,” *The Pantagraph*, April 30, 1914.

<sup>12</sup> “St. Mary’s Commencement,” *The Pantagraph*, June 13, 1912.

attending school past the eighth grade.<sup>13</sup> According to Shipley's nephew, Robert Shipley, Shipley and his brothers quit school because of the need to make money for the family.<sup>14</sup>

When Shipley was about 16 years old, he "started his circus career in the proverbial way"—by running away from home. While it is not known why Shipley ran off to join the circus, he was probably exposed to circuses from a very early age due to the fact that many circuses regularly passed through Bloomington-Normal. Additionally, many circus acts and aerialists were born and bred in the area and many of those circus people lived on the west side of Bloomington.<sup>15</sup> Shipley's family could have known or interacted with many of the local circus performers due to the close proximity of the family's home on West Locust Street.

It was noted in his obituary that he joined the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus<sup>16</sup> in 1919 and spent a season with them. It is not known what kind of work he was engaged in during this first stint with the circus<sup>17</sup> since his name has not been found in any of the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus route books from that year.<sup>18</sup> However, if Shipley

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<sup>13</sup> 1940 United States Federal Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com). Date Accessed July 25, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Robert Shipley, nephew of Richard Shipley, October 24, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Email correspondence from Maureen Brunsdale, Head of Special Collections and Rare Books, Illinois State University Milner Library, August 26, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Prior to Shipley joining the circus, Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus had been two separate circuses— Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey. Ringling Brothers was founded in Baraboo, Wisconsin in 1884 by brothers Alfred, Al, Charles, John, and Otto Ringling. The five brothers started the circus in their backyard after seeing one unload from a steamboat in Iowa. By 1900 Ringling Brothers had one of the largest traveling shows in the country and began buying up other circuses. Barnum and Bailey Circus was founded as two separate circuses as well. American businessman and showman Phineas Taylor (P.T.) Barnum created his own circus and traveling museum in 1875. James Anthony Bailey had had his own circus since the 1860s, the Cooper and Bailey Circus," which in later years boasted having the first baby elephant born in the United States. Barnum tried to buy the elephant from Bailey but Bailey would not give up his star attraction. In the end, Barnum and Bailey eventually agreed to combine their circuses in 1881, becoming Barnum and Bailey. After Bailey died in 1906, Otto Ringling wrote to his brothers the following year about how they should buy the Barnum and Bailey Circus, their chief competitor. Considering the United States was suffering from an economic recession at the time, this was a serious gamble for the Ringling Brothers Circus. This letter written by Otto Ringling can be found in the Illinois State University's Special Collections at Milner Library. Ringling Brothers eventually decided to purchase the Barnum & Bailey Circus in late 1907. They continued to keep the circuses separate until the United States entered World War I when audiences began to decline and many of their employees joined the military, thus Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey was born. "Ringling Brothers: The Beginnings of the 'Greatest Show on Earth,'" Wisconsin Historical Society, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Content.aspx?dsNav=N:4294963828-4294963805&dsRecordDetails=R:CS547>, Date Accessed July 31, 2016; "Barnum and Bailey Circus," Circus and Sideshows, <http://www.circusesandsideshow.com/circuses/barnumandbaileycircus.html>, Date Accessed July 31, 2016; Letter from Otto Ringling to his brothers, October 26, 1907; Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library and *The World Digital Library*, <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/10693/>, Date Accessed, August 26, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> "Circus Animal Trainer Richard Shipley dies."

<sup>18</sup> A circus route book documents the season for most nineteenth and twentieth century circuses. Information that can be found in route books includes: dates and locations of planned or contracted circus performances; railroads used; miles traveled; general attendance; names of show personnel broken down by the department they worked in; what performances were featured in each ring; and in some cases photographs of performers and animals featured in the shows. Route books were published at the end of a season and described the circus' activities that year. They were sold to employees of the show and circus fans; "Route book collection," The Ringling Museum, [https://www.ringling.org/sites/default/files/basic\\_page\\_download/archives\\_Route%20book%20list%20with%20description.pdf](https://www.ringling.org/sites/default/files/basic_page_download/archives_Route%20book%20list%20with%20description.pdf). Date Accessed August 7, 2016.

was just a regular circus worker with the show, it is doubtful that his name would have been printed in any of the route books, as those books typically listed only the main performers and trainers in the shows. Prior to his leaving to join the circus, he was working as a meat wagon driver for Clarence V. Thorp, owner of a local meat market located at 501 W. Market Street.<sup>19</sup>

After working with the circus for a season, Shipley returned home sometime in 1920. It is not known why he returned home, but he was listed as living with his parents at 907 W. Locust Street.<sup>20</sup> In 1923, Shipley embarked on a 20 year career working for the Boylan family. He was first employed as a chauffeur for Michael G. (M.G.) Boylan and Son.<sup>21</sup>

In 1900 M.G. Boylan opened a grocery store, which was located at 505-507 W. Market Street throughout most of its history.<sup>22</sup> The business prided itself as having “built up a reputation of handling only the best quality of goods that money could buy.”<sup>23</sup> Boylan had two sons, George J. (G.J.) and John L. According to Jim Boylan, grandson of M.G. Boylan, his uncle George came home after World War I and did not want to go into the grocery business. Instead, George took half of the store and added a confectionary to it.<sup>24</sup> In 1923, George’s younger brother, John, joined him in the business and it became known as Boylan Brothers.<sup>25</sup> That same year, the brothers began making and freezing their own ice cream with flavors such as lemon custard, vanilla pecan, maple nut, and juicy fruit.<sup>26</sup> They also created unique treats of their own such as the “princess stick” and the “funny sundae.”<sup>27</sup>

Just a year later, the brothers began making and selling their own candy.<sup>28</sup> The brothers had so much success selling their candy, that they opened a separate confectionery at 533 N. Main Street on March 31, 1926.<sup>29</sup> The original Market Street location, known as “The Spa,” remained open, though it no longer a grocery store. Instead, it became a short order restaurant

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<sup>19</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1919*, p. 463 and 580; United States Federal Census, 1920.

<sup>20</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1922*, p 517.

<sup>21</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1923*, p. 513.

<sup>22</sup> “Judges for Primary- List of Polling Places and Clerks in Bloomington and Normal Next Saturday,” *The Pantagraph*, March 12, 1902.

<sup>23</sup> “Boylan’s Grocery Sale-A Big Success,” *The Pantagraph*, September 3, 1918.

<sup>24</sup> Jim Boylan oral history, 1999, p. 8. Exhibit Manufacturing Collection, Oral History Interviews Box 2, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

<sup>25</sup> Boylan Brothers remained open until 1969 when the current owners, James and Michael Boylan (sons of John Boylan) decided to close the business. The West Market Street location was turned into a bar, known as Pub 1. However, James had so many requests for candy that he decided to reopen Boylan’s Candy part-time above the bar to fulfill requests and to help pay for his children’s tuition at Central Catholic High School. After another 25 years in business, James handed the store over to his son Pat, who moved the store to 1002 E. Front Street and continued to operate the store there until he sold it to Dan and Sally Flynn in 2006. However, the couple could not continue running the business in combination with their other businesses and closed the business in 2007; Dayna Vidas. “Boylan’s Excellence, A Look at its Past and Present,” 2002, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives 1-2; Sharon Wolfe, “Five Minutes with Boylan’s Candy,” *Business to Business, Connecting Central Illinois Businesses*, February 2007, 22-23; Jim Boylan oral history, p.3; Michelle Koettters, “Boylan’s Candies for Sale,” *The Pantagraph*, March 13, 2007.

<sup>26,26</sup> “Boylan’s Ice Cream,” *The Pantagraph*, February 19 and 26 and March 4, 1928; “Boylan’s Sunday Special,” *The Pantagraph*, October 18, 1931.

<sup>27</sup> Jim Boylan oral history, 10.

<sup>28</sup> “Boylan’s Golden Anniversary,” *Bloomington Centennial 1850-1950 Souvenir Program*, September 17-23, p. 30, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

<sup>29</sup> “Announcing the Opening of Our New Store- Boylan’s Confectionery,” *The Pantagraph*, March 31, 1926.

that served soda, candy, hamburgers, and French fries and continued to serve and make Boylan's famous ice cream in the spring and summer.<sup>30</sup>

In 1926 Shipley was working as a driver for the company.<sup>31</sup> Two years later, Shipley was working as a clerk in one of the Boylan Brother's stores.<sup>32</sup> By the time Boylan Brothers began selling their ice cream wholesale in 1930, Shipley had returned to being a driver for the company, possibly delivering ice cream to various retail outlets in the area.<sup>33</sup> In 1934, the *Bloomington-Normal City Directory* listed Shipley as being a foreman at Boylan Brothers Spa. By 1937, Shipley was a clerk at Boylan Brothers Ice Cream Co. and the next year he was an ice cream maker for the company.<sup>34</sup> Shipley continued to be an ice cream maker for the company until sometime between 1940 and 1941 when the circus life beckoned him to return.<sup>35</sup>

Shipley returned to the same circus that he ran away to join when he was just 16; Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus. According to the *1941 Route Book for Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey*, Shipley was listed as working in the elephant department.<sup>36</sup> This was the start of his 28 year career working with "Those Ponderous, Loveable, Hulking Harlequines of the Animal Kingdom."<sup>37</sup>

The first elephant was brought to this country in 1796 to New York.<sup>38</sup> In 1804, a man by the name of Hachaliah "Hack" Bailey saw an elephant by the name of "Old Bet" perform at a circus in Boston Massachusetts and was intrigued. Two years later, he saw the elephant again, purchased her, and put together his own animal show. "Old Bet" is thought to have been the second elephant imported into the United States.<sup>39</sup> "Old Bet" was an Indian elephant. Indian elephants were typically chosen for zoos and circus work because it was thought that African elephants were "too wild and treacherous to ever stand thorough training," and were not as smart as Indian elephants.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, most circuses imported elephants as opposed to raising them because it was cheaper. Most elephants born in captivity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not live past one year in age. And, because both male and female elephants were very devoted parents, it would be difficult to train young elephants with the parents trying to intervene and teach the offspring themselves.<sup>41</sup>

Elephants required a lot of care and constant training. First and foremost, elephants had to quickly be trained to become accustomed to the environment and conditions in the United

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<sup>30</sup> Vidas, p. 1

<sup>31</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*, 1926, p. 434.

<sup>32</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*, 1928, p. 434; *Bloomington-Normal City Directory 1929-1930*, p. 349.

<sup>33</sup> "Boylan's Golden Anniversary;" *Bloomington-Normal City Directories 1930-31*, p. 344; *Bloomington-Normal City Directory 1932*, p. 339.

<sup>34</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directories 1934, 1937, 1937, and 1940*, various pages.

<sup>35</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*, 1940, p. 341-342; United States Federal Census 1940.

<sup>36</sup> *Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Route Book for Season of 1941*, p.27. Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.

<sup>37</sup> *1949 Route Book for the Clyde Beatty Circus*, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> George C. Goodwin. "The Crownshield Elephant," [http://www.naturalhistorymag.com/editors\\_pick/1928\\_05-06\\_pick.html](http://www.naturalhistorymag.com/editors_pick/1928_05-06_pick.html), Date Accessed August 7, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Rae. "Old Beth and the Elephant Hotel," *Van Wyck Gazette*, <http://www.vanwyckgazette.com/old-bet/>, Date Accessed August 7, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> M.W. Meier, "How Circus Elephants are Trained," *Modern Mechanics*, July 1931, p. 56; "Training of Circus Elephants Dangerous Sort of Business," *The Scranton Republican*, June 10, 1906

<sup>41</sup> Meier, p. 56; "Elephants are Good Pupils," *Popular Mechanics*, August 1946, p. 138

States. Elephants could only be imported during certain times of the year. Once the elephants were in the United States, they “must be taught to tolerate temperatures of about 80 degrees or so.” During winter seasons, however, elephants had to be kept in steam-heat and during inclement weather while traveling, had to be provided with warm blankets and overshoes to lessen the chance of frostbite on their feet and ears.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, elephants had to be taught to eat hay, corn, oats, bran, and alfalfa since their native tropical foods, like bamboo shoots and rice, were hard to come by and expensive to import.<sup>43</sup> The feet of an elephant, much like a horse, required constant care. An elephant’s nails had to be filed (typically with a draw knife) every two months and all corns carefully removed. Trainers also “shaved” the whiskers of an elephant off with a blowtorch to help cut down on pests such as lice.<sup>44</sup> Elephants could also become easily upset, so their trainers had to work hard to keep them calm. An elephant could become panicked or hysterical due to the smallest incident; a barking dog, a whistle, or even a screaming child.<sup>45</sup>

According to Ralph Emersons Jr., who worked in the elephant department of the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus for eight weeks during the summer of 1944 (during the time of Shipley’s employment), the domain of the elephant department in most circuses consisted of “the elephant’s side of the menagerie tent and the area right outside of it.” The menagerie tent was where circus animals were displayed when not performing. People were allowed in the tent to view the animals, but the elephants were roped off so patrons could not get too close, but close enough to still allow patrons to interact with the elephants to a certain degree.<sup>46</sup> The bulls (slang for elephants)<sup>47</sup> and bull hands went in and out through tent-flies in the sidewall of the menagerie tent. Outside of the tent were the “bull top” and wardrobe wagons, the hay wagon, and the picket line for the elephants.<sup>48</sup> Elephants were either picketed (chained or tethered to a stake in the ground) outside or kept inside the big menagerie tent.<sup>49</sup> In good weather, elephants spent most of the day and night picketed outside of the menagerie tent.

The elephants were chained whenever they were not on the move. Their left front and right rear legs were chained to iron stakes (or on sandy lots, steel-necked wooden stakes in addition to iron stakes) that the bull hands drove in themselves. In train cars, the same two legs were fastened to rings; the rear leg fastened with a simple snap and the front leg by an iron “U” with a bolt running between the tips, known as a clevis. Chaining and unchaining elephants was done a dozen or more times a day. And according to Emersons, elephants could “easily undo snaps with their trunks, and they could undo clevises too if they fiddled with them and banged them against their stakes enough.”<sup>50</sup>

A predominately male-dominated profession, the elephant department consisted of a superintendent (or Boss Elephant Man), who was in charge of overseeing the entire department, training elephants, directing elephants during performances, and managing the assistants and bull hands; several assistants, who would have reported directly to the superintendent, helped

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<sup>42</sup> Meier, p. 56.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “Elephants are Good Pupils,” p. 138

<sup>45</sup> Meier, p. 58.

<sup>46</sup> Ralph Emersons. “A 1944 Ringing Bros. Circus Diary,” *Bandwagon*, January-February 2007, p. 4-5.

<sup>47</sup> While a “bull” is a male elephant, in the circus, all elephants were referred to by the general slang term of “bull.”

<sup>48</sup> Emersons, p. 9

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 4-5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

supervise workers, train and care for the elephants, and lead elephants through the performances; and bull hands, or general elephant workers.<sup>51</sup> Emersons recalled that the elephant men were characters. In his opinion, elephant men tended to be “tall and thin, wiry and fast on their feet even if they were old.” And, most of the elephant men went by nicknames. Shipley’s nickname was “Schlitz.”<sup>52</sup> According to Shipley’s nephews Jim and Robert Shipley, Shipley was given that nickname by circus folk because he had the liquor concession in his trailer and after the show, the circus folk would come to his trailer for liquor.<sup>53</sup>

Shipley most likely started his career working with elephants as a bull hand. His duties would have included: loading and unloading elephants off of trains; mucking out (removing manure); watering the elephants outdoors in canvas troughs (an elephant could drink about 40 gallons of water per day);<sup>54</sup> assisting in training exercises; and feeding the elephants with fresh hay and grain (elephants ate 100 pounds or more of hay every day, morning, noon, and night<sup>55</sup>). Bull hands would have also prepared the elephants for their performances; swept them off, dressed them in their costumes, and helped set up barrels, tubs, and other items in which the elephants would have performed their tricks on.<sup>56</sup> They would have also directed elephants in the labor that they provided to circuses; pulling wagons, setting up tents, etc.<sup>57</sup> However, Emersons stated that “some bull hands shoveled manure for months before the bosses even let them water an elephant.”<sup>58</sup> During the 1941 season, Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey had three assistants and 55 bull hands (which included Shipley).<sup>59</sup>

Training an elephant in the circus usually began between the ages of two to four years.<sup>60</sup> According to a 1931 *Modern Mechanics* article on training circus elephants, the first step was to teach the youngster his or her name. This was followed by teaching the elephant how to “tail,” meaning how to walk along holding the tail of the elephant in front of them.<sup>61</sup> Elephants were always worked from the left side because it was easier to handle them. They were also trained to sleep on their left side to conserve space in railway cars.<sup>62</sup>

After these basic skills were mastered, elephants then began to be taught tricks. One of the first tricks an elephant was taught was how to sit down and rear on its hind legs. This was attained with a “block and tackle and a leather belt,” which held the young elephant in the desired position. The command word was spoken in advance by the trainer and then the elephant was lifted into position.<sup>63</sup> According to a 1946 *Popular Mechanics* article, hoists and swings helped teach basic tricks such as an elephant standing on its hind legs. This is a difficult feat at first “because the stand requires the development of unused muscles and a high degree of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 3-5.

<sup>52</sup> This nickname could possibly have been in reference to the “Schlitz” beer brand, but no definitive information has been found to prove or disprove this.

<sup>53</sup> Jim and Robert Shipley oral history interviews, October 26, 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Meier, p. 56-57.

<sup>55</sup> Emersons, p. 10

<sup>56</sup> Emersons, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> *Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Route Book for Season of 1941*, p.27.

<sup>60</sup> Meier, p. 54; “Elephants are Good Pupils,” p.137.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p.54.

<sup>62</sup> Meier, p. 57

<sup>63</sup> Meier, p. 54

balance.”<sup>64</sup> Ropes were looped around each front leg and through an overhead pulley. At the trainer’s command, an assistant pulled on the ropes and the elephant was hoisted into position. A tub seat was also employed to help the elephant balance as it was learning this trick. A similar system of rigging was used to help elephants learn how to salute with their trunks as well. After doing this trick repeatedly with the aid of a hoist, eventually an elephant learned how to respond unaided to the command.<sup>65</sup> Some elephants were taught how to shimmy dance by ropes being loosely knotted around their bodies. The attendants pulled gently on the ropes from side to side like a see-saw at the command of the trainer. Elephants were also taught how to walk a “tight rope,” which in reality was a steel plank of narrow width painted to look like a coiled rope. Elephants were first taught to walk along this “tight rope” when it was spread flat on the ground. The “tight rope” was gradually raised from the ground an inch or two at a time. This trick was apparently not very challenging to elephants because “the great beasts have a profound sense of equilibrium.”<sup>66</sup> In order to maintain these tricks, elephants need to follow a daily program of activity to remember what is required of them. Young elephants had the additional benefit of watching older elephants go through their tricks to help them learn too.<sup>67</sup>

Elephant trainers employed another tool in the training and control of elephants; the bull hook. Bull hooks were a legacy from Indian mahouts.<sup>68</sup> Bull hooks looked like an ordinary cane shaped like a letter “J,” but had a small faucet shaped hook attached to the tip. Bull hooks helped elephant men control the elephants, not as a weapon, but as a guide. Elephants worked mostly by voice command, like most animals. At times, the bull hook was used to reinforce or replace voice commands, sort of like a hand on a shoulder, but was seldom necessary. And there were strict guidelines for elephant men on how they could use bull hooks. They were not allowed to hook on the ears or anywhere ahead of the neck, and “easy does it” everywhere else. Emersons said that elephant men carried bull hooks everywhere with them more like a badge of office. He even stated that bull hooks “were good to lean on. . .and if you braced your legs right, you could even cat nap in that position” as some men often did. He recalled that in general, elephants and men cooperated. A man had to want to work in the elephant department. A man who did not like elephants, did not get on in the department. And a man who mistreated elephants, did not stay very long.<sup>69</sup>

Tricks were not the only thing that elephants were taught. They were taught how to work; as one elephant is more useful “than tractors, motor trucks, and dozens of men.” Elephants helped with everything from moving wagons (including wagons with caged animals in them), setting up tent poles, and more.<sup>70</sup> According to a 1931 *Modern Mechanics* article, a full grown elephant could lift about 1,000 pounds with its trunk and the amount of tonnage an elephant could push was even more.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “Elephants are Good Pupils,” p. 139

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Meier, p. 55-56.

<sup>67</sup> Meier, p. 54

<sup>68</sup> Mahout is the Hindi word for an elephant trainer, rider, or keeper in India; Joanna Sugden, “India’s Vanishing Elephant Mahouts,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 7, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2013/08/07/indias-vanishing-elephant-mahouts/>, Date Accessed August 7, 2016,

<sup>69</sup> Emersons, p. 13

<sup>70</sup> Meier, p. 57.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

By 1944, Shipley was an assistant in the elephant department with Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus.<sup>72</sup> During this season, Shipley and the other two assistants would have been responsible for supervising upwards of 37 men (the number varied throughout the season as men came and went from the circus) and caring for and training 30 elephants.<sup>73</sup> It was during this season, however, that Shipley and the other elephant hands would have had their skills and training put to the test. The Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus suffered a devastating loss when a fire broke out while the circus was in Hartford, Connecticut, the worst circus fire in U.S. history.

The fire broke out on July 6, 1944, the second day of the circus in Hartford, during what seemed like a typical day for performers, workers, and spectators alike. The afternoon show began around 2:23 p.m. and the bull hands were getting the elephants outside the menagerie ready for the show.<sup>74</sup> Around 2:40 p.m., the fire that had started on the big top tent was noticed. By 2:44 p.m. the first alarm had sounded (which the traditional disaster signal for the circus was the *Stars and Stripes* being performed by the band) and the crowd of spectators began to flee as the fire quickly spread across the big top tent. Just moments later, the big top roof and poles collapsed, as circus people were frantically trying to pull wagons and other equipment away from the sidewalls of the tent.

As the fire continued to spread, the workers in the elephant department quickly realized that they had to get the elephants away from the fire; not only to keep the elephants safe, but to protect people in the chance that the startled and upset elephants stampeded and caused even more damage. Emersons, Shipley, and all the elephant men “converged on the picket line and began unchaining” the elephants. Within two minutes, all of the elephants were free and being hurried past the side show. Emersons recalled that he and the other elephant men “did not ride ‘em out, we ran ‘em out—some squealing, some had their tails in the air and that means panic when you see it in an animal.” The elephant men took their charges away from the chaos caused by the fire. They took them down a dirt road and through a patch of trees northeast of the big top, to where the cook tent and horse tents were located. The new picket line was set up in a shady meadow, known as Sponzo’s meadow. A circus truck then brought all the stakes and chains and hay to calm the elephants down. Emersons remembered that the elephants calmed down faster than their handlers did!<sup>75</sup> None of the circus’s 700 employees (not including performers) were killed. Of the between 6,000 to 7,000 spectators in attendance, 168 of them perished because of the fire.<sup>76</sup> The fire put a halt on the season for the circus for several weeks.

The cause of the fire has been debated since it happened. Some reports suggested arson, others the fire was due to a lit cigarette being flicked underneath bleachers near the big top tent causing combustible material to catch fire, or simply a careless smoker flicked a lit match or cigarette into a pile of hay near the sidewalls of the big top. No official cause for this fire has ever been established. However, a modern theory has been established. At the time, in order to

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<sup>72</sup> *Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Route, Personnel, and Statistics for the Season of 1944*, p. 22, Illinois State University’s Special Collections, Milner Library.

<sup>73</sup> Emersons, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19-20

<sup>76</sup> “Facts and Figures about the Hartford Circus Fire,” *The Hartford Circus Fire*, July 6, 1944;

<http://www.circusfire1944.com/facts--figures.html>, Date Accessed August 8, 2016; *Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Route, Personnel, and Statistics for the Season of 1944*, p. 8



waterproof the big top tent, an older and cheaper method of waterproofing was applied. A highly combustible treatment of paraffin wax, boiled and thinned with gasoline, was applied to the tent in May before the season began. While this mixture waterproofed the tent, the tent was never fireproofed.<sup>77</sup>

Eight days after the fire, the circus was allowed to return to its winter quarters in Sarasota, Florida where it could regroup and reorganize. Emersons recalled some memories of interacting with Shipley while the show was on the break. On their first evening at their winter quarters, Emersons said that he watched rehearsals and had quite a talk with Shipley. Emersons stated that “the elephant boss Shipley was probably the guy I liked the best on the show.”<sup>78</sup> On another occasion, Emersons, Shipley, and a man by the name of Santana, went fishing at Lido Beach and had a nice day. On August 4 of that year, Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey performed their first show after the fire. However, the circus could only perform in open air arenas for the remainder of the season since they had not yet been able to replace their big top tent.<sup>79</sup>

Shipley continued working with Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey for five more years after the fire. During this time he crisscrossed the country appearing in shows in New York; Washington D.C.; New Orleans; Nashville; Sioux City, Iowa; Kalamazoo, Michigan; and many more. Even though he traveled far and wide, Shipley never forgot his family in Bloomington, particularly his mother. Throughout Shipley’s circus career, and as long his mother was alive, if the circus that Shipley was working for came anywhere near Bloomington, Shipley would either visit his mother in Bloomington or send tickets so that someone else could bring her to see him.<sup>80</sup>

By 1945 Shipley had been promoted to superintendent of the Elephant Department and was in charge of 24 men.<sup>81</sup> That season, while the circus was performing in Lafayette, Louisiana, Shipley suffered a broken arm while loading the elephants into a stock car after the show was over.<sup>82</sup>

On August 19, 1947, Shipley returned to his hometown of Bloomington when Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey performed throughout Northern and Central Illinois. A week before the show stopped in Bloomington for a single day, *The Pantagraph* announced Shipley’s (and other local circus performers) return.<sup>83</sup> Two performances were planned to be held at O’Neil Park, located on the west side of Bloomington. It was also during this visit from circus that one local boy, Leonard Camp, received an extra special treat. His visit to the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey circus was the first time he had ever been to a circus. Camp was recognized as “a good and deserving boy” by Sgt. Merle Arbogast of the Bloomington Police Department. And because of that recognition, Camp was taken on a back stage tour, “where few children or adults ever get to go,” by *Pantagraph* reporter Stan Windhorn and chief *Pantagraph* photographer Don Goodrich. According to the article about Camp’s visit to the circus, all Camp could do on his

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Emersons, p. 24

<sup>79</sup> Emersons, p. 21 and 24; *Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Route, Personnel, and Statistics for the Season of 1944*, p.37-38.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Shipley Oral History.

<sup>81</sup> *Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Route, Personnel, and Statistics for the Season of 1945*, <http://www.circushistory.org/History/RBBB1945.htm>, Date Accessed August 8, 2016.

<sup>82</sup> “Texans Give it to Big One, Blows Opener in N. Orleans, Richard Shipley, boss bull man, breaks arm—insurance firms pay \$56,607,” *Billboard Magazine*, September 29, 1945.

<sup>83</sup> “Local Showmen Will Appear with Circus,” *The Pantagraph*, August 13, 1947.

way to the circus was talk about the elephants and how he wished to ride one. In addition to meeting most of the circus clowns and several local aerialists during his tour, Camp met Richard Shipley. It was Shipley who fulfilled Camp's request to ride an elephant, and to Camp, that was the highlight of his tour.<sup>84</sup>

Shipley remained the superintendent of elephants for Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey circus elephant department until 1947 when he left that circus for unknown reasons. In 1949, Shipley shows up as the elephant trainer for the Clyde Beatty Circus.<sup>85</sup> According to the 1949 route book for the Clyde Beatty Circus, Shipley and his "nearly 150 tons of pachyderm actors" were the feature performance in the center ring. Shipley was assisted by "two of Spangleland's most talented girls;"<sup>86</sup> Milongo Cline and Albina Beatty.<sup>87</sup> During the 1949 season, Shipley and the Beatty Circus traveled between March 24 and October 16 to cities such as Flagstaff, Arizona; Gallup, New Mexico; Hollywood, California; Dodge City, Kansas; Joplin, Missouri; and many more.

By 1951 Shipley was listed as the superintendent in the elephant department and had one assistant and seven other bull hands working under him.<sup>88</sup> During a performance in Van Nuys, California, in May of that year, Shipley, three herds of elephants, and "more than a score of international beauties" were the highlight of the Beatty's show. Shipley's elephants included "Big Bertha," who was one of the biggest elephants on tour.<sup>89</sup> Other elephants included in Shipley's herds were Pee Wee, Suzie Q, Sidney, Anna May, Babe, Hattie, Cora, Lucy, and Inez.<sup>90</sup>

For the 1952 season, Shipley was working on new routines for his elephants. It was reported that these routines and tricks were completely new and "that no other circus offers a more thrilling and spectacular elephant display."<sup>91</sup> "The huge beasts" were to present a thrilling sight as they performed their intricate routine. The climax of their performance was that they formed a column-mount directly in front of the grandstands. After saluting the crowds, the

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<sup>84</sup> "Leonard Camp Sees His First Circus," *The Pantagraph*, August 20, 1947.

<sup>85</sup> Clyde Beatty started his circus career as a cage boy. Quickly learning his trade, he then started his own wild animal cage act. After working for several other circuses in the mid-1930s and early 1940s, Beatty purchased the Wallace Brothers Circus (a circus that traveled by truck) and renamed it the Clyde Beatty Circus in 1945. The show did so well that Beatty decided to move from traveling by truck to traveling by rail. Beatty sold his truck show equipment and purchased a controlling interest in the 15-railroad car Russell Brothers Pan Pacific Circus, which he renamed the Clyde Beatty Circus. By 1947, Beatty was the sole owner and he had several years of success. However his circus fell on hard times in the late 1950s, and by 1956, Beatty's circus folded and was bought out. In 1959 the circus's name was changed to the Clyde Beatty Cole Circus and Beatty continued to be active in the show until his death in 1965; "Clyde Beatty Circus," <http://www.circusesandsideshow.com/circuses/clydebeattycircus.html>, Date Accessed August 8, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> The word, "Spangleland," is a slang term for "circus."

<sup>87</sup> *Clyde Beatty Circus Official Staff-Route Program and Statistics for the Season of 1949*, p. 13, Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.

<sup>88</sup> *Clyde Beatty Circus Official Staff-Route Program and Statistics for the Season of 1951*, Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.

<sup>89</sup> "Clyde Beatty Circus Due Here for Monday Shows," *The Van Nuys News*, May 3, 1951.

<sup>90</sup> "Search on Richard Shipley," Buckles Blog, <http://bucklesw.blogspot.com/search?q=%22Richard+Shipley%22>, Date Accessed August 8, 2016.

<sup>91</sup> "Clyde Beatty Circus Boasts Great Troupe of Elephants," *The Van Nuys News*, May 1, 1952.

elephants marched from the arena on their hind-legs—“the only group of elephants that have ever mastered this most unusual trick.”<sup>92</sup>

After the season ended for the year, Shipley went back to Bloomington for a short time, perhaps to visit his family that was still living there. Shipley also took several of the circus ponies he trained with him. Unfortunately, the ponies escaped the garage of his home on West Locust Street. *The Pantagraph* reported that “children and dogs in the neighborhood...had a field day...chasing three circus ponies which were on the loose.” Shipley rounded up the ponies which he later took with him to the winter quarters for the Beatty Circus in Florida.<sup>93</sup>

Nineteen fifty-four was a big year for Shipley and the Clyde Beatty Circus. In addition to continuing to perform throughout the country, Beatty and his circus starred in the Hollywood feature film titled *Ring of Fear*. Featured in “Warnercolor,” the film starred Clyde Beatty (as himself); Mickey Spillane, American crime novelist; and Pat O’Brien. The synopsis of the film was that Beatty’s circus seemed to be jinxed, falling victim time and again to a series of accidents that no one can seem to explain. In reality these accidents were being caused by a saboteur and deranged killer that was on the loose in his circus. In order to solve the crime, Beatty called in crime novelist, Mickey Spillane (who played himself) to catch the killer. The film was produced by actor John Wayne, who had his own production company, Wayne-Fellows Productions (later renamed Batjac Productions).<sup>94</sup>

In addition to the murder mystery that must be solved, the film featured many of the performers, clowns, and circus workers of Beatty’s Circus. Shipley, who plays himself as the elephant trainer in the film, was listed in the credits, mentioned by name in the film, and was shown on screen several times. The film was shown locally at the Irvin Theater for an entire week in August 1954.<sup>95</sup>

Clyde Beatty’s circus continued to have great success into the 1955 circus season, with remarkable turnouts and excellent profits. In a show in Pampa, Texas, Shipley and his trained elephants “displayed a trunk full of tricks.” One of those tricks included an elephant walking a plank with a girl riding a top. Shipley’s elephants were also trained to turn around in circles as the band played “London Bridge is Falling Down.”<sup>96</sup>

According to Beatty’s cage boy, Manual “Junior” Ruffin, a lot of people did not like Shipley. Ruffin thought that Shipley was one of the greatest ever (though he admitted he was the only elephant trainer he had worked under). Ruffin said that Shipley taught him everything about elephants, “from trimming their toenails to using a blow torch to cut their hair.” Shipley even paid Ruffin extra money to help the elephant crew walk their charges to and from the train. This was especially helpful to Shipley since he drove his own private trailer between performances.<sup>97</sup>

However, by 1956, many circuses across the nation were beginning to fold under, including Beatty’s. At the beginning of the season, Beatty owed a substantial amount of money on a loan he took out to keep his circus running earlier in 1955. Because of declining attendance, he could not continue to keep up on payments on the loan. In addition to financial woes, bad luck

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> “Circus Ponies Try New Act,” *The Pantagraph*, December 8, 1952.

<sup>94</sup> Dan Craft. “Three Rings: Two Cities,” *The Pantagraph*, June 23, 2016.

<sup>95</sup> “Former Resident in Beatty Film,” *The Pantagraph*, August 31, 1954.

<sup>96</sup> “Clyde Beatty Circus Thrills Young and Old Alike Here,” *Pampa Daily News*, September 29, 1955.

<sup>97</sup> Lane Talburt, “From Deming to Deland, Beatty’s Circus Swoons, Claws Back Under New Management, Part Two,” *Bandwagon*, March-April 2010, p. 33.

continued to plague the circus when a circus worker, Andrew Grotzky, was apparently kicked to death by a female elephant named Inez (who had always been a source of problems for the circus) in the menagerie.<sup>98</sup> By the spring of 1956, Beatty's circus had shut down, which Beatty blamed on television, stating that "television has steadily cut into the business of the circus since 1952."<sup>99</sup>

The circus reopened in August of 1956. While it still carried Beatty's name, Beatty no longer had any financial stake in the show. His sole duty was to work his act as an independent contractor of sorts.<sup>100</sup> Shipley continued to work with Beatty's circus (now named the Clyde Beatty Cole Circus) after it was reorganized and his elephants continued to be a big draw. Shipley was listed as the elephant boss at the start of the 1957 season,<sup>101</sup> but after that he disappears from the route books. It has been said that Shipley was recruited to return to the reorganized Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus (which like many other circuses at that time, had also fallen on hard times) for the 1958 and 1959 seasons.<sup>102</sup> However, route books for those two seasons could not be located to prove either way that Shipley had rejoined the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus.

In March of 1959, Shipley began working for the final circus of his career, the Carson and Barnes Circus.<sup>103</sup> However on his very first day working for the circus as their elephant superintendent, Shipley suffered a terrible and almost fatal accident.<sup>104</sup> While the circus was at their winter quarters in Hugo, Oklahoma, Shipley was performing an inspection tour of the elephant barn.<sup>105</sup> During the course of inspection, he noticed that one of the leg irons was loose on an elephant named Dorothy.<sup>106</sup> As Shipley knelt down, Dorothy went into her headstand act on top of Shipley for no apparent reason. Dorothy was trained to do a headstand on a barrel by command. Shipley would have been crushed to death had it not been for the quick thinking of Freddie Logan, head elephant man for the Kelly-Miller Circus (whose winter quarters was also in Hugo).<sup>107</sup> According to newspaper accounts of the incident, "Logan sought to drive the animal off, and failing, gave the signal for the end of Dorothy's act, and she rolled off Shipley." Shipley was then taken to the hospital where he only suffered a broken collar bone and several broken ribs.<sup>108</sup>

This was not the first time that Dorothy had attacked one of her trainers, however. Less than five months prior, Dorothy belonged to the Hagen Brothers Circus. The circus was set to perform a show at Groves, a suburb of Port Arthur, Texas on Tuesday evening, November 25,

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 35

<sup>101</sup> "Beatty Show Reports Make-Up of Staff," *The Billboard*, March 30, 1957, p. 92

<sup>102</sup> Talburt, p. 41

<sup>103</sup> The Carson and Barnes Circus (also known as the Carson and Barnes Wild Animal Circus) was founded in 1937 as a dog and pony show by Obert Miller in Kansas. Four generations of the Miller family have owned and operated this circus and it continues to travel the country today; "Our History," The Carson and Barnes Circus, <http://www.carsonbarnescircus.com/history/>, Date Accessed August 14, 2016.

<sup>104</sup> "It's the Zoo For Dorothy," *The Paris News*, April 13, 1959.

<sup>105</sup> "Circus Elephant To Be Executed," *The Montana Standard*, April 11, 1959.

<sup>106</sup> "Dorothy the Circus Elephant Gives Last Show Tomorrow," *Rome Daily Sentinel*, April 11, 1959.

<sup>107</sup> Fred Pfenig, Jr. "The Original Carson and Barnes Circus: The Jack Moore Shows," *Bandwagon*, July-August 1999, p. 5

<sup>108</sup> "Circus Elephant To Be Executed."

1958.<sup>109</sup> On the day before the show, while Dorothy was chained by one leg, she reached out with her trunk and knocked down a circus attendant, James Donald Lloyd, as he and a fellow circus attendant walked past her. Dorothy then butted Lloyd with her head several times while he was on the ground, pinning him in place, and then began to perform her headstand trick on top of him (though one newspaper account from the time stated that she attempted one headstand but failed before making a second successful attempt).<sup>110</sup> According to circus officials, Dorothy was trained to do a headstand beside a circus performer during shows. Newspaper accounts of the incident reported that Dorothy “deliberately stood on her head on top of the prostrate man.” Lloyd’s head and chest were crushed by the weight of Dorothy. After other circus attendants drove her back “with beatings and shouts,” they were able to rush Lloyd to a hospital. However, the extent of his injuries was far too great and he died about an hour after the incident.<sup>111</sup>

While this attack appeared to be unprovoked, this was not the first time that Dorothy had injured other persons. This was, however, the first time she had ever killed anyone.<sup>112</sup> The Justice of the Peace ruled Lloyd’s death as accidental and nothing was done to Dorothy. Dorothy was even allowed to perform the very next night before the crowd. Dorothy performed her trick without a hitch, lowering her head to within a few inches of a prostrate circus performer.<sup>113</sup>

A short time after the incident, the twenty-five year old Dorothy was sold to the Carson and Barnes Circus for \$5,000 (which in 2015 would be about \$41,000),<sup>114</sup> with the hope that the circus would be able to rehabilitate her. According to Joe Sullivan, a spokesman for Carson and Barnes Circus, Dorothy’s rehabilitation had been going very well for the three months prior to her almost crushing Shipley to death.<sup>115</sup>

In light of her second attempt to take a man’s life, circus officials deemed that Dorothy could not be rehabilitated. She was sentenced to death by public execution. The sentence was to be carried out by Oklahoma Highway Patrolman Ed Vandergriff at 2:00 p.m. on April 12, 1959. Dorothy was to be chained to a hillside east of the winter headquarters of the circus and “dropped with a high-powered rifle.” Shipley stated that he planned to be present at her execution.<sup>116</sup>

However, a “storm of protests” broke out when news of the incident and Dorothy’s sentence reached the national media. Notes and telephone calls from across the country poured in with pleas to save Dorothy’s life. A Miami, Florida dentist went so far as to suggest that “it was bad teeth that caused Dorothy to dislike people.”<sup>117</sup> An offer to relocate Dorothy to the Tulsa Zoo in Tulsa, Oklahoma also came to the Carson and Barnes Circus with the hope of sparing Dorothy’s life.<sup>118</sup>

In the end, Dorothy’s life was spared thanks in part to the efforts of Tulsa radio station manager Bob Hoth. Hoth started negotiations between the owner and manager of the circus, Jack

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<sup>109</sup> “Killer Elephant Does Head Stand Act Without Hitch,” *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, November 26, 1958,

<sup>110</sup> “Elephant Does Headstand On Attendant To Kill Him,” *Tucson Daily Citizen*, November 24, 1958.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> “Ponder Fate Of Elephant Which Kills Circus Man,” *The Daily Times*, November 25, 1958.

<sup>113</sup> “Killer Elephant Does Head Stand Act Without Hitch.”

<sup>114</sup> Consumer Price Index, <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, Date Accessed August 14, 2016.

<sup>115</sup> “Dorothy the Circus Elephant Gives Last Show Tomorrow.”

<sup>116</sup> “Dorothy, The Elephant, Will Be Executed,” *Denton Record-Chronicle*, April 12, 1959.

<sup>117</sup> “It’s the Zoo For Dorothy.”

<sup>118</sup> “Killer Elephant: Life Or Death?” *The Paris News*, April 12, 1959.

Moore, and the Tulsa Zoo. Hoth also said that he would raise the necessary funds to move Dorothy to the zoo. While Dorothy's life had been spared, she was to be kept in solitary confinement in a maximum security pen at the zoo.<sup>119</sup>

Moore said he was happy that they did not have to execute Dorothy. Shipley stated that Dorothy would make a good zoo elephant. He said that Dorothy was not broken right, and "now, she's like a spoiled child." He added that when elephants go bad, "they're all bad." Shipley's injuries caused him to miss the first three weeks of the circus's season, which started on April 15, 1959. This was also not Shipley's only injury caused by an elephant. He had been hospitalized three times prior to this latest incident while working with elephants in other circuses. After this latest injury, Shipley said that he was getting too old for this now.<sup>120</sup>

While Shipley may have thought he was getting too old for this kind of work, after he recovered from his injuries, Shipley returned to his duties as elephant superintendent and trainer with the circus. He had his elephants work tricks such as the plank walk. During the 1962 season, three elephants named Ginny, Mabel, and Susie, performed with Shipley. Shipley was also assisted by Wanda (Moore) Hoover, the daughter of Jack Moore who owned and managed the circus. Hoover was listed as a stylist in the circus's official year book.<sup>121</sup> By 1963, the menagerie consisted of five Indian elephants: Jenny, Mabel, Josky, Wanda, and Susie. In addition to his work with the elephants during this season, Shipley also had three dog acts.<sup>122</sup>

Wanda (Moore) Hoover had many fond memories of working with Shipley in her father's circus. Hoover's father, Jack Moore, purchased one of the elephants that she and Shipley worked with, Mabel, when Hoover was very young. She recalled that it was her and her brother's job to make sure that Mabel would not wander off while she was grazing. Eventually, when Hoover got older, she began to perform with the elephants. Hoover recalled that while the circus was in winter quarters at Hugo, she and Shipley would practice new routines for the upcoming seasons. One winter Shipley decided that they should add a new trick...where Hoover would lie on the ground and an elephant would step over her. Hoover stated that elephants have small eyes and could not see well around their feet. So Shipley said they would try the trick with a burlap bag first. Shipley produced a burlap bag and brought the first elephant around to try the trick; Mabel. Shipley brought Mabel up to the bag and she refused to step over it. Next, Shipley brought up Jenny and when she got to the bag, she stepped right in the middle of it. Finally, Shipley brought Susie up, who in Hoover's opinion was a spoiled and mischievous elephant. Susie came up to the bag, stepped over it, and then hit it with each foot. Based on the different reactions from each elephant, Hoover suggested to Shipley that they should try something else.<sup>123</sup>

After about 10 years with the Carson and Barnes Circus, Shipley retired from the circus life. According to Shipley's nephews, Jim and Robert, Shipley left the circus life because his eyesight was going. Shipley returned to Bloomington for about one year, in 1970, and was back

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<sup>119</sup> "It's the Zoo For Dorothy."

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> *Official Yearbook, 1962 Carson and Barnes Circus, America's Second Largest Big Top*, Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.

<sup>122</sup> Douglas Lyon. "Carson and Barnes Big 3 Ring Circus," *Bandwagon*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan-Feb), 1963, p. 12-13.

<sup>123</sup> Wanda (Moore) Hoover, "Mabel My Elephant Friend and Partner," *The Town that Raised Us: Home town Memories of Hugo, Oklahoma*, <http://ifoxster.tumblr.com/post/48743080839/mabel-my-elfphant-friend-and-partner>, Date Accessed, August 14, 2016.

living at 907 W. Locust Street in Bloomington.<sup>124</sup> His sister Sarah (Shipley) Carlson also lived at the same address and cared for Shipley upon his return to Bloomington.<sup>125</sup>

On August 23, 1973, just a few years after his retirement, Richard Shipley passed away at the age of 69 at the Lincolnland Nursing Home in Lincoln, Illinois.<sup>126</sup> The cause of his death was listed as a heart attack and it is not known why Shipley was living at the nursing home at the time of his death.<sup>127</sup>

Shipley never had children, though he may have had a brief marriage to a woman named Opal Cornwell from Peoria, Illinois. In the July 20, 1935 edition of *The Pantagraph*, a marriage license appears to have been granted to Shipley and Cornwell.<sup>128</sup> However, no marriage record has been found. In the 1940 United States Federal Census, Shipley lists his marriage status as “divorced,” and Cornwell was remarried by that time (married to John Wood) but no divorce record for Shipley and Cornwell has been found either.<sup>129</sup>

Shipley’s death was lamented by *The Pantagraph* as the loss of another local circus veteran. His funeral was held at St. Patrick’s Church, of which he was a member. Shipley was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

*After many decades of litigation, accusations of cruelty and abuse, protests by animal rights activists, shifting public opinion regarding the captivity and use of wild animals for entertainment purposes, and more recently, several municipalities passing ordinances outlawing or restricting elephant acts, the elephants of Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus performed for the last time in May of 2016. After 145 years, the circus sent the last of its elephants into retirement at the Ringling Center for Elephant Conservation in Central Florida. Many have hailed this decision as a victory for the more humane treatment of animals, with the hope that other circuses will follow suit and discontinue using elephants in their shows.<sup>130</sup> Still, others regret that future generations will not share in the spectacle of seeing these massive mammals perform their impressive tricks under the big top.*

By: Candace Summers, 2016

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<sup>124</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1970*, p. 399.

<sup>125</sup> “Circus Animal Trainer Richard Shipley dies;” Robert Shipley Oral History; Jim Shipley Oral History.

<sup>126</sup> “Circus Animal Trainer Richard Shipley dies.”

<sup>127</sup> Burial Record for Richard Shipley at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, Bloomington, Illinois.

<sup>128</sup> “Marriage Licenses,” *The Pantagraph*, July 20, 1935.

<sup>129</sup> “Richard Shipley” and “Opal Wood,” 1940 United States Federal Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), Date Accessed October 24, 2014.

<sup>130</sup> “Ringling Will Retire Circus Elephants Two Years Earlier Than Planned,”

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/01/160111-ringling-elephants-retire/>, Date Accessed August 22, 2016;

Katie Mettler, “After 145 years, Ringling Bros. Circus elephants perform for the last time,”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/05/02/after-145-years-ringling-bros-circus-elephants-perform-for-the-last-time/>, Date Accessed August 22, 2016.