

# The West End Museum

150 STANIFORD STREET, SUITE 7, BOSTON, MA 02114

## New Exhibit Traces West End Circus Tradition & History

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Boston, MA—From December 2, 2014 through January 31, 2015, [The West End Museum](#) will host a new exhibit, *The Circus: A West End Tradition*, in its Members Gallery. The exhibit traces the origins and development of the circus in the U.S., from the late 1700s through the present day, and its strong connections to Boston's West End. The show reception takes place on December 13 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., when attendees can tour the exhibit and enjoy light refreshments. The exhibit and reception are free and open to the public. (*Media note: Downloadable show-related images appear [here](#).)*

*The Circus: A West End Tradition* will feature graphic panels detailing the development of the modern American circus from its very beginning through the present day and highlighting the impact of specific acts and venues in the West End. Related artifacts dating back to the early 1800s will be on display.

"The circus has been part of American entertainment since the earliest days of our nation, and—with the Boston Garden and Scollay Square—the West End has played a big role in Boston's entertainment scene from those early days through today," said Duane Lucia, West End Museum Board President and Curator.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, Puritanical values ruled the day and theater was not viewed as a suitable form of entertainment. Early circus-like attractions, however, were seen as more wholesome. So theater managers established themselves in the local entertainment landscape with such acts, which served as a springboard to later theatrical endeavors. *The Circus: A West End Tradition* will cover the following:

- England's Philip Astley, credited with staging the first modern circus in London in 1768 featuring animal acts, acrobats and clowns
- John Bill Ricketts, credited with bringing the first circus to America (Philadelphia) in 1793; expanding from equestrian performances to tightrope, juggling and acrobatic acts; his traveling circus in Boston in summer 1794
- The opening of the American Amphitheater (later the National Theater) by Thomas L. Stewart in 1832 at Portland and Traverse Streets
- The propagation of the circus clown
- The advent of the sideshow or freak-show at a time when scientific study was rapidly changing; Austin and Stone's Dime Museum in Scollay Square (modern-day Government Center/Cambridge and Court Streets)
- P.T. Barnum's role—popularizing the dime museum model with key attraction General Tom Thumb; founding the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1881; debuting Jumbo the Elephant in 1882
- The merger of Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey; the debut of Gargantua the Gorilla in 1938
- The circus as a Boston Garden mainstay since its opening in 1928

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*About the West End Museum:*

*The West End Museum is dedicated to the collection, preservation and interpretation of the history and culture of the West End neighborhood. The Museum's permanent exhibit, "The Last Tenement," highlights the immigrant history of the neighborhood through its decimation under Urban Renewal in 1959; two additional galleries feature rotating exhibits. The Museum is located near North Station at 150 Staniford St. Suite 7. Hours: Tuesday - Friday 12:00pm - 5:00pm; Saturday 11:00am - 4:00pm. Admission is free.*

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