Jumbo the Elephant is probably best remembered as the official mascot of Tufts University, but in his day Jumbo was a media darling and the face of the Barnum and Bailey circus from March 1882-1885. He is widely thought to be the origin of the word Jumbo, meaning large in size, by historians, but there is evidence that the name Jumbo was used as early as 1847 in an advertisement for the comedy *Jumbo Jam* at the National Theatre. An African Bush Elephant, Jumbo was born in 1861 in Mali. His mother had been killed and Jumbo was captured by Arabian hunters, which started a long and complicated journey across Europe.

Jumbo was first taken to an Italian Animal Dealer and then to a menagerie in Germany, eventually he was installed as an attraction in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. Officials at the botanical garden traded Jumbo to the London Zoological Society in 1865 for a rhinoceros, where he lived for sixteen years giving rides to children. Jumbo was iconic and widely loved even before he was part of Barnum and Bailey’s circus. When he was bought by Barnum there was a public outcry in London against his removal from the country.

When Barnum brought Jumbo to Boston in 1882, he was part of a procession through the streets of the West End. His route was announced in the Boston Globe; the tour led from the Coliseum Grounds on Huntington Ave., to Boylston, Charles and Cambridge Streets stopping in Bowdoin Square before continuing on. The newspapers, cottoning on to the new popular ‘idol’, dramatized Jumbo’s life in captivity, often reported on romantic exchanges between Jumbo and other female elephants. The story at that time was that Jumbo had forgotten his first love, an elephant named Alice in the London Zoo, and had fallen in love with a new ‘elephantine beauty.’

Jumbo died in 1885 when he was hit by a train car in St. Thomas, Ontario. Barnum exaggerated the story, claiming that Jumbo died saving a young elephant from being hit. There is no evidence that this is true.

Barnum had Jumbo stuffed and for a brief time paraded his life sized skeleton and taxidermied carcass around as part of the Barnum and Bailey Circus. Jumbo’s skeleton was later donated to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, where it is no longer on display. His heart was sold to Cornell University, and Barnum, a trustee and benefactor of Tufts donated Jumbo’s stuffed hide to the University. Jumbo was a great hit at Tufts, and well loved by the students. But in 1975, Barnum Hall and Jumbo were destroyed in a fire caused by faulty wiring. A piece of his tail remains and is still in the Tufts University archives. Some ashes were also saved in an empty peanut butter jar, and kept as a good luck charm for the University sports teams.