The Ringling Brothers purchased the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1907, but ran the two circuses separately until they were finally merged in 1919. Almost ten years later the Ringling Brothers became an annual attraction at the Boston Garden in 1928. Many other circuses from around the country and the world have performed at the Boston Garden as well.

In 1937 the London Hippodrome Circus performed their stunting and exciting acts there, including a tightrope walking bear and an acrobat diving from the Garden rafters into a 5-foot-deep flaming pool of water.

In 1939 the American Legion Circus played the Garden for ten days. Notably, a Boston game was played in the middle of the run. The last five days featured the Clyde Beatty Wild Animal Circus. Founded by Clyde Beatty (1888-1964), an animal trainer and circus impresario, Beatty is best known for his “lightning act,” in which he entered a cage which could include any combination of bears, tigers, cougars and lions with a whip and a pistol. He became a wild animal personality, the instant lion tamer, and even, at one point, had his own radio show, “The Clyde Beatty Show.”

Both the Hamid-Morton Circus and the Aleppo Shrine Circus come back to the Boston Garden a number of times, first in 1941 with the original Lone Ranger, and in 1942 they featured a tightrope walking lion. In 1943 the circus advertised an exciting animal-filled Wild Show, as well as Pepe Ringling, who rode his bike in the rafters of the Garden, before leaping into a tank of water only three feet deep. These combined events also showcased the Flying Walendas, a German family of daredevil highwire performers, formerly with the Ringling Brothers, who were well known for performing without safety nets.

The Hamid-Morton Circus was the brainchild of its nameakes, George A. Hamiel Jr. (1896-1971) and Robert Morton. Hamid’s father had been an entrepreneur and major player in American outdoor amusements. Hamid himself began his career with the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show and then moved on to form a partnership with Morton.

The Hamid-Morton Circus played the Garden again in 1948 and 1955 without the Shrine Circus. In 1949 the featured act changed to include a trained seal and Captain Dick Clements’ show of trained wild cats and in 1955, had its last run at the Garden featuring 40 trained doves.

In 1963 and 1967 the Moscow Circus visited the Garden. In 1967 the circus brought with it an aerial silk walker and a motorcycle riding bear. The circus played the Boston Garden again in 1975, this time it was the Soviet Circuses.

...another world where we exchange facts for fantasy, where logic is lunacy and lunacy is lighthearted, as well as lightheaded... —Kevin Kelly, Boston Globe, 1967

In 1967 Los Muchachos Revolucionarios Circus of Benpola, Spain played the Boston Garden for four days. The circus was made up of all boys from a social democratic town. They believe that “a circus is the finest prayer man can offer up to God.” Benpola, Spain was a town founded by Father Jesus Silva in 1956 as a safe haven for homeless children, and the circus was meant to spread the message of the town around the world.

In 2012 Cirque de Soleil brought their Michael Jackson show to the Boston Garden.

Today the issue of circus animals has reached 150 years of climax. In 2012 the Ringling Brothers Circus learned that PETA and other animal rights organizations paid a barn worker $180,000 to be their star plaintiff in a lawsuit with Ringling involving Asian elephants. PETA had been protesting the Ringling Brothers use of animal acts for years; ironically in 2012 the circus sued American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) under the Racketeer Influence and Corruption Organizations Act (RICO) in Feld Entertainment Inc. v. American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The lawsuit reached a settlement when the ASPCA paid the circus $9.2 million.