

CIRCUS & NATION

**A critical inquiry into circus
in its Australian setting,
1847 - 2006,
from the perspectives of
society, enterprise and culture.**

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any substantial material previously submitted by me for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by any another person except where due reference is made in the text. The length of this thesis (Introduction, Parts I, II and III and Conclusions) is approximately 96,000 words, excluding front papers, abstract, footnotes, appendices and sources.

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ABSTRACT

In Australia, like most countries, circus has been an element, at times a very important element, in the mosaic that constitutes its popular culture. An outgrowth of the circus as recast in a modern form in London in the 18th century, an Australian circus profession has existed almost continuously since 1847. Australia's circus entrepreneurs took the principal features of English, and later American, circus arts and management and reworked these features to suit their new antipodean context. The athletic, intellectually undemanding nature of its equestrian-based entertainments harmonised with the emerging patterns of modern Australia's way of life. In time, Australia produced renowned circus artists of its own, even artists capable of reinvigorating the concept of circus in the very countries from which their art had been derived. Since their transience and labours, indeed their very existence, were somehow tangential and inconsequential to mainstream Australian society, Australia's circus people did not attract tokens of recognition in story and verse as did shearers, drovers, diggers and other identities of the Australian outback. Their contribution to Australia's social, economic and cultural development has been largely overlooked. Despite its pervasive role in Australia's cultural life over more than 150 years, examples of academically grounded research into Australian circus are few. The primary aim of this study is to demonstrate the major themes evident in Australia's circus history, in terms of society, enterprise and culture, between 1847 and 2006. None of these areas, of course, is exclusive of the others, especially the first and last named. These deliberations are framed within the broader influences and events apparent in Australian society and history. Implicit within this demonstration is the notion that circus, whatever its characteristics and merits as an artform, has been, and continues to be, a 'barometer' of *social, economic and cultural* change in Australia.

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'culture' was once restricted to literary or artistic matter of a high order. The term, 'popular culture' refers to culture that is popular, widely accessible and accessed, widely disseminated and viewed or heard.¹ Circus is an example of popular culture. Australia's popular culture is a largely derivative one. The concept of circus in Australia, like the English language itself, distanced from its roots to pursue a destiny of its own, has been progressively adapted to accommodate the social, economic and cultural imperatives of its antipodean setting. Like the English language also, circus in Australia has been presented in its localised, imported and, increasingly, globalised forms.

Circus has proved to be one of Australia's most enduring performing arts genres. The oldest surviving circuses are the relicts of some of Australia's earliest entertainment organisations while the newest reflect contemporary Australian cultural practices. The origins, nature and consequences of circus in Australia therefore deserve to be established and understood. Furthermore, since important aspects of each historical age are revealed to posterity through the character of its entertainments,² the identification of significant themes in Australian circus may assist future inquiry into

¹ L W Levine, 'The folklore of industrial society: popular culture and its audiences', in *American Historical Review*, Vol. 97 No 5, Dec 1992, p.1373.

² M W Disher, *Fairs, circuses and music halls*, London: William Collins, 1942 p.20.

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Australian circus, Australia's entertainment history and into Australia's social, economic and cultural history generally.

Objective

The aim of this study is to identify and explain the major themes evident in Australia's circus history through a systematic examination of the material gathered over many years of largely unstructured research. The absence of a comprehensive, academically structured and thematically organised inquiry into circus in Australia, together with the passive exclusion of circus from works of popular history to date, justify the preparation of this work. Fifteen themes were identified for examination over the period from 1847, the year that Australia's first successful circus opened, until the present time, 2006. These themes are presented within one of the broad contextual areas of society, enterprise and culture.

Subsidiary objectives

This study has three subsidiary objectives. The *first* is to argue that Australian circus activity has been a continuous process of adaptation and refinement of the original English model. The *second* is to demonstrate that circus in Australia, although derived from this English model and overlaid with other, chiefly American, influences has developed and exhibited artistic and operational characteristics that are uniquely Australian. The *third* is to explain why circus and circus people were overlooked or marginalised in works of Australian history and literature.

Circus

In the original Latin, the word 'circus' means 'circle'. Correctly applied, the word circus refers to the site, not the character, of a performance and does not define the nature of performances presented therein. The institutional structures of circus have ranged from small, precarious family troupes, through countless 'road shows' to companies of international standing. Even the term 'circus' has been loosely applied to a range of performing practices and organisations, which have incorporated an eclectic mixture of entertainments taken from a diversity of sources not necessarily recognisable as circus.³ Popular works of circus history, such as those of Thomas Frost (1876), Earl Chapin May (1932) and Rupert Croft-Cooke and Peter Cotes (1976) discuss the history and development of the circus, since antiquity, at length but do not define circus as a concept, possibly because circus is not a fixed category of performance and is constantly re-defining itself.⁴ George Speaight (1980) describes the 'essence of circus' as 'acts of skill performed by men and women or by trained animals, presented in a ring, with the audience grouped around'.⁵ Antony Hippisley Coxe (1980) also identifies the ring, as developed and used by early trick-riders, as the 'quintessence' of the circus but asserts that acrobats, rope-dancers and clowns were necessary to complete the entertainment.⁶ Helen Stoddart (2000) cites Marcello Truzzi's 'wide ranging definition', apparently preferred by historians and circus folk alike, that 'a circus

³ H Stoddart, *Rings of desire*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p.3.

⁴ L G Hoh and W H Rough, *Step right up! The adventure of circus in America*, White Hall, Virginia: Betterway Publications Inc, 1990, p.20.

⁵ G Speaight, *A history of the circus*, London: The Tantivy Press, 1980, p.38.

⁶ A Hippisley Coxe, *A seat at the circus*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980, p.28.

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is a travelling and organised display of animals and skilled performances within one or more circular stages known as 'rings' before an audience encircling these activities'.⁷ However, this definition overlooks the fact that some circus entertainments, such as the early amphitheatres, were actually fixed location enterprises rather than peripatetic companies.

Circus is defined in *The Concise Macquarie Dictionary* as:

n.1. a company of performers, animals, etc., esp. a travelling company. 2. the performance itself. 3. a circular arena surrounded by tiers of seats, for the exhibition of wild animals, acrobatic feats, etc. 4. a place, originally circular, where several streets converge. 5. uproar; a display of rowdy sport and behaviour. 6. an entertaining or humorous person.⁸

The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary defines circus as:

n. 1. travelling show of horses, riders, acrobats, clowns, performing animals, etc; (colloq) disturbance, scene of lively action; (colloq) group of persons performing in sports etc together or in succession. 2. (Hist) rounded or oval arena lined with tiers of seats, for equestrian and other exhibitions 3. amphitheatre of hills; (UK) open space in town where streets converge (Piccadilly Circus). [L. = ring].⁹

⁷ Stoddart, p.3.

⁸ A Dellbridge, (ed.), *The concise Macquarie dictionary*, Revised edition, Sydney: Doubleday Australia Pty Limited, 1980, p.217.

⁹ G W Turner, (ed.), *The Australian concise Oxford dictionary*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.183.

From a synthesis of these alternative definitions and perspectives can be distilled a working definition of circus: *an organised sequence of equestrian and other performances given within a ring, surrounded by spectators, by a company of horses, riders, acrobats, clowns and performing animals.*

Two qualifications to this working definition are necessary, however. The *first* is that, despite much written to the contrary, the circus of modern times is, at best, only tenuously related to the circus of ancient Rome.¹⁰ The *second* is that, today, there are two major strands of professional circus activity in Australia: the *conventional* circus derived from the original Astleian model, and a *contemporary* circus movement which, while itself derived from conventional circus, rejects some of its tenets (for example, the use of animals) while embracing others characteristically atypical of conventional circus (for example, the use of circus as a medium to broadcast social messages).

Circus & identity

An exercise in history should be inter alia a contribution to the story of the nation-state, but it can also be an exercise in 'identity', including the identity of the self – in this case, *myself* – a reclaiming of one's own past, not just the nation's.¹¹ For as long as I can remember, I was smitten by my surname 'St Leon' but the origins of the name were shrouded in obscurity. I was just as much intrigued by my family's circus heritage but perplexed by the stark absence of definite information. I was to find that my surname was a professional

¹⁰ Speaight, p.34.

¹¹ G Davison, *The use and abuse of Australian history*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000, pp.264-67.

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pseudonym adopted in 1865 by my circus forbears - and not the token of French or Huguenot ancestry to which allusion was vaguely made. And I was to find that the details of my circus heritage had been either forgotten or progressively altered to meet the circumstances of each new generation, thus distorting the few oral messages to remain after more than a century of circus activity with contradictions, omissions and misinformation.

My work over some thirty-five years and *this* work in particular are therefore as much an exercise in self-identity and self-authentication as they are an attempt to historically legitimise a marginalised and often deprecated genre of the arts. Whether the personal agenda is more important than the public, I cannot honestly say, since each is inextricably linked to the other. I can say, however, that the second is unlikely to have been addressed without the imperative of the first.

While one of the most powerful forms of history in the contemporary world, identity-based history is also one of the most dangerous since, rather than stressing common humanity, it emphasises difference. The pressures to 'isolate the history of one part of humanity - the historian's own, by birth or choice' from its wider context are often great, especially if the historian's own group is threatened or persecuted. Yet a serious historian owes a duty to humanity that overrides his or her group loyalties. Even if the historian is unable to completely escape his own prejudices, something is at least gained in the conscientious attempt to overcome them and reveal them to the reader. Fortunately, the scope for interpretation is always constrained by the evidence and by standards of interpretation of the evidence.¹²

¹² Davison, pp.264-67.

Nation

The incorporation of the term 'nation' – a term describing the political and administrative apparatus holding sovereignty over a defined space or territory – in the title of a thesis devoted to circus may be a vexed one. An Australian 'nation' did not exist before 1901. As institutional concepts, nation and circus may appear to be not well suited to each other. Nevertheless, as an example of 'European civilisation transplanted to this big south land',¹³ circus activity on Australian soil has taken place within the emerging framework of a nation, a nation-in-waiting before 1901 and a nation-state thereafter. As early as 1817, the name 'Australia' was affixed to the land now occupied by the nation. Newspapers, such as *The Australian* (founded in 1824), and books, such as Joseph Lycett's *Views in Australia* (published in 1824), were among modern Australia's earliest cultural manifestations to bear the word Australia in their titles. The amphitheatre opened in Sydney's York Street in October 1850, was called the Royal *Australian* Equestrian Circus [my italics], the first occasion where the words 'Australia' and 'circus' were used together.¹⁴

Nation & identity

A nation does not necessarily infer the existence of a formed national culture since it may contain different cultures, however described, and since cultures, in any case, are not necessarily coterminous with national borders.¹⁵ This point is particularly pertinent to an examination of the circus since the semiotics of circus, unlike other

¹³ D Horne, *The lucky country*, Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1964, p.92.

¹⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Oct 1850.

¹⁵ C Barker, *The SAGE dictionary of cultural studies*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2004, pp.131-32.

manifestations of Australian culture, such as the swaggie or Vegemite, are more or less globally recognised.

The social, economic and cultural elements embodied within a nation are neither static nor mutually exclusive and the nation continuously absorbs and reflects the mutations constantly taking place beneath its surface. The characters of both Australian circus and Australian nation have undergone and continue to undergo constant revision and redefinition in similar ways. To smooth the paths of trade and commerce, regulation and intercourse, the nation-state continually produces, fosters, imagines, creates or constructs an identity for itself from the raw material of its unique but ever-evolving stock of objects, artefacts, landscapes, images, rituals, traditions, values, customs, beliefs, rites, attitudes, conventions, symbols and stories. Forms of communication give currency and symbolic expression to the identity of a nation, to its underlying values and other characteristics. Differentiation is one of the key drivers of consumption and therefore capitalism, and a nation's identity, thus manufactured and differentiated from those of other nations, can be recognised, understood and shared.¹⁶

A nation's identity also draws on the mystique of its landscape for much of its 'enchantment'.¹⁷ Those who first came to terms, aesthetically and practically, with Australia's natural environment and began to create a landscape out of wilderness¹⁸ were also the first to be imbued with the archetypal characteristics of a sense of 'Australianness'. By the 1890s, the eve of the formation of an

¹⁶ Barker, pp.131-32; R Trotter in T Bennett and D Carter, *Culture in Australia: policies, publics and programs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp.340-41.

¹⁷ S Schama, *Landscape and memory*, London: Fontana Press, 1996, p.15.

¹⁸ J Rickards, *Australia: a cultural history*, Harlow, Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd, 1998, pp.43, 50; Schama, p.10.

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Australian nation, a romantic sense of national identity had emerged, based on the democratic egalitarianism associated with the early settlers of rural Australia, the anti-authoritarian and unpretentious values of the rural, bush and outback workers and their progeny. They or their forebears did not conform to the established social pattern of the British Isles.¹⁹ Russell Ward's *The Australian Legend*, although politically biased, is possibly the most influential work on this topic.

However, in recent decades, this view of Australian history has more or less disintegrated as the study of history has become more open and aware of divisions and conflicts in the national past, and more sceptical of consensual mythologies. Notions of progressive and egalitarian Australian nationalism as postulated in the late 19th century and early years of the 20th embodied racist and xenophobic overtones, and overlooked meaningful contributions of women and others. Furthermore, the reliance of one of the world's most urbanised societies on an imagined rural nostalgia as the basis of its identity was clearly paradoxical.²⁰

In recent decades, Australia's historians have steadily expanded the range of criteria for inclusion in the formulaic recipe for a national identity. *This thesis will add one more for consideration: the heritage of Australian circus and its people.*

¹⁹ E P Thompson, cited in H Cunningham, *Leisure in the industrial revolution*, London: Croom-Helm, 1980, p.193.

²⁰ M Lyons and P Russell, *Australia's history: themes and debates*, Sydney: U N S W Press, 2005, xv-xvi.

Society

The term 'society' is not only our most general term for the body of institutions and relationships within which a relatively large group of *people* live but our most abstract term for the condition in which such institutions and relationships are formed.²¹ In this thesis, I employ the term society to mean a continually evolving system of human organisation – cities, towns, institutions, businesses, groups—a social system that is both negotiable and alterable over time.

Australia neither experienced nor accumulated all the characteristics of a European agrarian society although European civilisation brought some of these characteristics. Instead – once the period of free settlement and enterprise commenced – the emerging norms of the new industrialised civilisation were selectively put into place, all of them subtly and endlessly worked and reworked to suit the imperatives of their new antipodean landscape.

The character of a society's entertainments sheds light upon the character of that society²² and, eventually, posterity's perception of it.²³ Although circus may be studied for the content and delivery of its programmes, and the presentation of an array of artistic and physical skills, this form of entertainment mirrors wider human phenomena. It represents, and has represented, the activities of *people* – entrepreneurs and those they employed for their operations, on the one hand, and concentrations of people for their audiences, on the other. It was and is, whatever its social standing, a social

²¹ R Williams, *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*, Glasgow: Fontana, 1976, p.243.

²² K Brisbane, (ed.), *Entertaining Australia: an illustrated history*, Sydney: Currency Press, 1991, p.18.

²³ Disher, p.20.

institution. It was and remains an element of society and therefore represents a barometer of Australia's social development. In her wide-ranging study *The Circus Age: Culture & Society Under the American Big Top*, Janet M Davis looked to the American circus as a means of understanding the American people, their social groupings and their nation.²⁴ Could a study of the Australian circus make a similar contribution to our understanding of the emergence of Australian society?

A cross-section of society would reveal the existence of groups of people with shared socio-economic conditions, social and cultural relationships, which, over time, can be understood as the phenomenon of 'class'. However, a class does not exist as a 'stand alone' group of people but is to be understood in relation to other classes within an overall system of social stratification; a relational set of inequalities with economic, social, political and ideological dimensions; and a dynamic cultural classification rather than a fixed objective fact.²⁵ The relationships of classes of people to each other are continuously altered by shifts in population, ecology, technology, culture, and other factors.²⁶ Although the Marxist notion of class was limited to the fundamental division between those who own the means of production and those who must sell their labour, modern notions of class include considerations of lifestyle based on income, occupation, status and education,²⁷ indeed anything that may be construed as a 'network of communicative action'.²⁸

²⁴ J M Davis, *The circus age: culture and society under the American big top*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, xiii.

²⁵ Barker, p.26.

²⁶ A Toffler, *Powershift: knowledge, wealth and violence at the edge of the 21st century*, New York, New York: Bantam Books, 1991, p.468.

²⁷ Barker, p.26.

²⁸ J Habermas, 1979, cited in A Swingewood, *Cultural theory and the problem of modernity*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998, p.63.

How then is the circus perceived as a social institution? What defines its people as a class and where do they stand in relation to each other and in relation to more conventional examples of society? What aspects of life and work distinguish its people from other people? To what extent has circus thrown the structure of Australian society and its underlying issues into relief? To what extent did – and does – Australian circus lend itself to expression of Australia as a nation? Each of these five questions is addressed, respectively, in the following chapters:

Chapter 1 Image & legitimacy

Chapter 2 People & class

Chapter 3 Life & work

Chapter 4 Town & country

Chapter 5 Place & nation

Enterprise

Critical to a viable circus industry was the entrepreneur, knowledgeable of, if not directly experienced in, the techniques of circus production and management; capable of perceiving the need for these entertainments in a colonial setting; capable of bearing the risks involved; capable of assembling and organising the requisite human, material and financial resources; and capable of promoting the circus to the public. By engaging in entrepreneurial activity, entrepreneurs become, consciously or not, agents of change and therefore of economic growth and material progress.²⁹ Coincidentally, a dynamic popular culture is a consequence of the

²⁹ A Layton, T Robinson and I B Tucker, *Economics for today*, Melbourne: Thomson Learning, 2002, p.4.

free choice provided by a free market. To this extent, it will be argued that the circus represents a microcosm of Australian enterprise and a barometer of Australia's economic development.

As an example of business enterprise, how and why was the concept of the circus adapted to its new environment? What factors determined the distribution of circus activities throughout Australia? To what extent was Australia served by imported circus activity and what was the impact of this activity? What risks faced circus entrepreneurs and how did they maximise their pecuniary returns? To what extent has Australian circus been the agent of wider developments in economics and technology? Each of these five questions is addressed, respectively, in each of the following chapters:

Chapter 6	Novelty & innovation
Chapter 7	Push & pull
Chapter 8	Visits & visitors
Chapter 9	Risk & return
Chapter 10	Economy & scale

Culture

Rituals and social practices as well as material artefacts describe the culture of a society or social group.³⁰ Over time, a society will accumulate a unique cultural history: an accumulation of the signs, symbols, rituals and practices that historically shape ideas, beliefs, habits and action.³¹ In the course of this process, new observations

³⁰ H M Teo and R White, 'Introduction', in H M Teo and R White, (eds.), *Cultural history in Australia*, Sydney: U N S W Press, 2003, p.11.

³¹ S Garton, 'On the defensive: postructuralism and Australian cultural history', in Teo and White, p.54.

and meanings are constantly being offered and tested against known meanings and directions, and either absorbed or rejected.³² Cultural practices and choices help us to define who we are in relation to, those with whom we identify and those from whom we wish to differentiate ourselves.³³ It was argued that Australia has 'no genuine culture' since a 'deep and intimate' relationship between the people and the land has yet to accumulate. There had not been time to deposit and accumulate a rich collection of 'myths, memories and obsessions' as those embedded in the landscape of older civilisations, since colonisation, industrialisation, modernisation and internationalisation have occurred too rapidly.³⁴

In early 19th century England, the population explosion and immigration from the countryside and Ireland fuelled both urbanisation and industrialisation. The culture of the people – their religious holidays, fairs, wakes, festivals and pastimes – gradually ceased to move to the seasonal rhythms of agricultural work and instead began to move to the rhythm of the factory.³⁵ Thus was the pre-industrial folk culture replaced by a popular culture for the industrial age: a culture not emanating from within the community but created, often artificially, by people with pecuniary or ideological motives, for masses now deprived of an organic community capable of producing its own culture.³⁶ Popular culture, like folk culture, helped people to construct their attitudes, values, ideas, beliefs, habits, actions and reactions.³⁷ Whether perceived at a local, national

³² Williams, 1989, p.4.

³³ T Bennett, M Emmison and J Frow, 'Social class and cultural practice in contemporary Australia', in Bennett and Carter, p.195.

³⁴ Thompson, cited in Cunningham, p.193.

³⁵ J M Golby and A W Purdue, *The civilisation of the crowd: popular culture in England, 1750-1900*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd. Revised edition, 1999, p.39.

³⁶ Levine, p.1370.

³⁷ Levine, p.1372.

or global level, popular culture is closely related to its environment and is adapted to different occupational groups and regional ways of life.³⁸

If popular culture embraces the manifestations of, inter alia, the leisure habits of ordinary people, then the entertainment proclivities of Australians represent an important facet of Australia's popular culture. As a form of popular culture and driven by basic pecuniary instincts, the circus compensated to some degree for modern Australia's absence of an embedded folk culture and transcended the inherited 'Old World' characteristics and emerging parochialism of regional Australia. In constructing its own signs, markers and meanings for its own purposes, circus in Australia has also shaped some of the signs, markers and meanings of broader Australian cultural heritage and identity.

While the lines between culture and society are somewhat blurred, there is a sufficiently clear distinction between these domains to allow them to be separated as Raymond Williams demonstrated in his influential work *Culture and Society*.³⁹ Culture is both traditional and creative: it comprises both known meanings and directions, and the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested.⁴⁰ Within a social system we may find a part of culture that tends to directly support or confirm the system's existing structural pillars, its 'official' culture through which the social order is 'communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored'.⁴¹ That part of culture which

³⁸ P Burke *Popular culture in early modern Europe*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1994, p.245.

³⁹ D Throsby, *Economics and culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.7.

⁴⁰ R Williams, *The politics of modernism: against the new conformists*, London: Verso, 1989, p.4.

⁴¹ R Williams, cited in Springewood, p.83.

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is unofficial – popular culture – is what remains and, if sanctioned by the existing hegemony, will tend to indirectly support the prevailing social system by providing a sense of cohesion between those structural pillars. In the Soviet Union, state-sponsored circus was firmly a part of the official culture.⁴²

The enviable reputation of Russian circus ... is based on 200 years of tradition, but in particular 70 years of massive state support under the communist regime ... To the founding fathers of the Soviet state ... circus ... was a truly popular – egalitarian – form of entertainment, enjoyed by all, regardless of race, language, age, education, class ... The fall of communism threw this massive cultural organisation into disarray as social changes produced a new middle class with more leisure time and more entertainment options to fill it.⁴³

In Australia, circus was closest to the official culture at its dawn when it was licensed by, and closely accountable to, the colonial authorities as a sanctioned ‘innocent’ or ‘rational’ form of amusement and, more recently, when its contemporary manifestations were the recipients of, and closely accountable for, government largesse. In between these extremes, circus in Australia has been a largely autonomous example of a dynamic popular culture, largely apolitical in nature and impact, an agent more of prevailing social taste and economic circumstance than of a ruling hegemony.

Richard Waterhouse identified ‘four major characteristics’ that affected and defined the emergence of an ‘Australian’ culture between 1850 and 1914 and set the scene for Australia’s cultural

⁴² Speaight, pp.171-72.

⁴³ Anon, ‘The rise and decline of circus in Russia’, in *Keeping in Touch: The Quarterly Magazine of Jewish Care*, No.84, Dec 2005, pp.9-10.

development for the remainder of the 20th century.⁴⁴ Each of these was mirrored in the development of Australian circus over the same period. Firstly, popular culture became increasingly commercialised, mass-produced, widely heard, disseminated and read: at its top level at least, *Australian circus* became increasingly professionalised, mobile and accessible. Secondly, American cultural influences were felt in Australia, especially in the area of theatrical entertainments: *Australian circus* absorbed the lessons and examples visiting American circuses had to offer in terms of organisation and production. Thirdly, Australia's shared public culture, 'an aesthetic of high culture without the institutions', disappeared as intermittent visits by touring companies were replaced by institutions designed to cater to more specialised audiences: since *Australian circus* had never been a part of this aesthetic, its disappearance was to the benefit of instruments of popular culture such as circus. Fourthly, Australian colonial culture assumed some hybrid characteristics as it was relentlessly overlaid with selective examples of other cultures, particularly American and English: by 1914, and probably earlier, aspects of *Australian circus* were recognisably Australian, neither wholly English, nor wholly American in character, and its performers recognisably Australian in the circuses and other venues of England and the United States.

Since 1914, these trends have continued, the processes of cultural transmission magnified, retarded and accelerated as deemed necessary by contemporaneous factors such as prolonged economic protectionism, depression, war, post-war immigration, integration with Asia and the Pacific regions, the intensification of communication and transport linkages, and economic globalisation: the arts and management of *Australian circus* have been, and

⁴⁴ R Waterhouse, 'Cultural transmissions', in Teo and White, pp.120-23.

continue to be, reworked to adapt people, acts, routes, methods, standards, animals and paraphernalia to continuously changing local circumstances, preferences and tastes.

Today, contemporary Australian culture is regarded as a derivative culture, the result of neither wholly organic growth nor wholly imposed hegemony but the results of a continuing series of cultural imports and internal transcultural exchanges constantly reworked to meet local, national or global circumstances.⁴⁵ A derivative culture will always retain some relationship to its originating culture which itself is continuously evolving.⁴⁶ It is within this derivative culture that elements of popular and folk culture may well be perceived, which may even be, justifiably or not, claimed as uniquely 'Australian' since what is imported is at least re-contextualised in meaning if not in substance.

The common symbols and expressions of Australian identity have not yet embraced circus and its folk with the same ardour as they have the shearers, swagmen, drovers and others. Circus folk were too momentary in place and time, their heritage obscure and social standing questionable. The more exceptional achievements of Australia's circus people – not to mention their stoicism, heroism and cleverness – have not entered the mainstream of Australian popular memory. But, buried within the pages of contemporary newspapers lay at least the outlines of their contribution to modern Australia.

In earlier eras of less widespread mobility and communication, the circus people of Australia methodically circumscribed the land in enormous touring loops. They were witness not only to the

⁴⁵ R Waterhouse, in Teo and White, p.117.

⁴⁶ Rickards, xi.

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widespread changes being wrought on the natural landscape but the accumulating evidence of Australian identity. Until the more recent widespread availability of modern forms of transport and communication, few other occupational groups, indeed few people, were so exposed.

We have talked with employees of these nomad[ic] troupes and their experiences form quite a romance of the gold diggings, bush townships, inns, roads and no roads, forests, streams, and mountains.⁴⁷

Yet, what did the circus leave that permanently altered or enriched Australia's landscape? If the appreciation of a nation's cultural landscape were confined to tangible constructs such as buildings, paintings and sculptures, we would have to concede that circus has left very little. Of the several 'amphitheatres' erected in the 1840s and 1850s, all were soon demolished or converted to alternative use. The commonly observed symbols of the peripatetic circus - its people, animals, bills and paraphernalia - were too transient to leave permanent impressions upon either the landscape or emerging historical and oral traditions.

However, a nation's culture is not only one of objects and imagination but also of action and the ideas implicit in action.⁴⁸ If the circus left little or no imprint upon Australia's physical landscape, it did leave behind profound traces of culture. The circus gave people the opportunity to construct, however banal, attitudes of their own, make comparisons, define values and form reactions. A nation's

⁴⁷ Anon, 'Show business', in *Imperial Review*, Jul 1884, pp.32-5.

⁴⁸ A Atkinson, 'He filled us with laughter: contact and community in Australian experience', in Teo and White, 2003, p.43.

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cultural landscape may also exist in intangible forms such as ideas, practices, beliefs, stories and values shared by groups.⁴⁹ Circus was and is a form of communication, metaphorically speaking, a language, just one of innumerable patterned exchanges and interactions that characterise a culture.⁵⁰ At its most basic level, an artist who entertains an audience by performing in the circus ring is effectively performing an act of communication, artist and audience as 'sender' and 'receiver' respectively of a 'message'.⁵¹ To this extent, it will be argued that the circus has contributed to the foundations of Australian culture as that term is understood today.

What was the impact on the landscape of a visiting circus? What was the spectrum of engagement between circus and audience and how did this alter over 150 years? What was the role of wild and exotic animals in Australian circus and how did this alter over 150 years? How have circus and sport overlapped with each other? What transformation has Australian circus undergone since 1847? These questions are addressed, respectively, in the following chapters -

Chapter 11	Promotion & presence
Chapter 12	Sights & sounds
Chapter 13	Beasts & curiosities
Chapter 14	Art & sport
Chapter 15	Then & now

⁴⁹ Throsby, p.45.

⁵⁰ P Bouissac, 1976, *Circus and culture: a semiotic approach*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976, p.5.

⁵¹ Bouissac, p.13.

Literature Review

From more than two centuries of modern Australian civilisation, a sense of Australian popular culture is beginning to emerge. Yet, the standard, general works of Australian history do not seriously address the peripheral yet ubiquitous phenomenon of the travelling show, circus or otherwise. A longstanding lack of scholarly interest in Australian circus is probably explained by the genre's transitory and peripheral character and its perceived unintellectual ambience. Despite the recent upsurge of research into Australian entertainment history, Australian circus remains marginally integrated into the mainstream of Australian historical writing. Although some of the world's most famous circus artists were of Australian origin, the history of circus in Australia has received only passing attention at an international level. For example, of the 16,536 entries that comprise Raymond Toole-Stott's *Circus and Allied Arts: A World Bibliography*, published in five volumes between 1958 and 1992, only three entries pertain directly to circus in Australia.⁵² Where then do we seek the raw material from which to fashion a work of this nature?

- Local history

Although unable to provide a comprehensive account of the origins and development of circus in Australia, local and regional histories sometime demonstrate how the circus was a feature of emerging colonial communities. For example, in his study of the Riverina, Geoffrey Buxton (1967) gives unusually generous coverage to early entertainments in the region in the period 1861-91, including the visiting performers, 'mostly circuses and musical entertainments ...

⁵² A Ringling, *Life story of the Ringling brothers*, Chicago: R R Donnelley & Sons Company, 1900.

whose arrival often coincided with a race week or [agricultural exhibition]’;⁵³ in his study of early Ballarat, Weston Bate (1978) mentions the presence of Jones Circus on Ballarat Flat in February 1854 just as the Austrian artist Eugene von Guerard was there to sketch the spacious spread of Jones’ single-pole circus tent against the backdrop of the tented township;⁵⁴ and Matthew Higgins (1990) identifies ‘the entrepreneurial opportunities offered by the [Sofala] goldfield’ as the reason why ‘two leading circus operators’ were established in the township by October 1852.⁵⁵

- Reference works

The pre-eminence of Wirth Brothers Circus in the early 1900s saw the inclusion of a biographical entry on Philip Peter Jacob Wirth (1864 - 1937) in the 1925 edition of *The Australian Encyclopaedia*. Entries on circus and closely associated topics have appeared in general reference works published in Australia in recent years. I have chronicled the lives and careers of circus proprietors, such as Philip and George Wirth in *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*.⁵⁶ My entry on circus in *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Australia* (Bambrick, 1994) briefly outlined the steps in the early development of Australian circus: its English origins, the exhibitions prior to the gold rushes and the launch of itinerant troupes to service the emerging

⁵³ G L Buxton, *The Riverina 1861-1891: an Australian regional study*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967, p.97.

⁵⁴ W Bate, *Lucky City: the first generation at Ballarat, 1851-1901*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1978, p.41.

⁵⁵ M Higgins, *Gold and water: a history of Sofala and the Turon goldfield*, Bathurst, N S W: Robstar Pty Limited, 1990, p.29.

⁵⁶ M St Leon, ‘Wirth, Philip Peter (1864-1937) and George (1867-1941)’, in J Ritchie, (gen. ed.), *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 12: 1891-1939*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990.

inland communities.⁵⁷

- Memoirs

The Wirth brothers, George and Philip, committed their memories to publication in their books *Round the World with a Circus* (1925) and *The Life of Philip Wirth* (1933), respectively. Their sister, Marizles Martin, left a lengthy written memoir.⁵⁸ These are the only known extended memoirs of Australian circus people. As extensive and valuable as it is, the Wirth cache of circus history is not without its inaccuracies and contradictions. The papers of the N S W Labor politician and barrister, John D FitzGerald, include extensive notes collected for a planned history of the famous circus conducted by his brothers, FitzGerald Brothers Circus.⁵⁹ In the 1930s, my septuagenarian great-grandfather, Walter St Leon, committed his circus memories to paper but these were lost. An attempt in 1961 to compile a history of Australian circus from personal recollections led to the preparation of an initial 200-page manuscript, *Fortunes Made, Fortunes Lost*, but efforts to trace this unpublished work and its compiler, one 'Ru' Roberts, have proved fruitless.⁶⁰

- Oral history

During the 1970s and 1980s, I conducted approximately thirty loosely structured interviews with members of Australian circus families and

⁵⁷ S Bambrick, (ed.), *The Cambridge encyclopedia of Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.350.

⁵⁸ M Martin, *Marizles Martin: her reminiscences*, John & Mabel Ringling Museum of Art, The State Art Museum of Florida, Sarasota, File 1100:35, c.1940, edited and reproduced in M St Leon, *Australian circus reminiscences*, Sydney: The Author, 1984, pp.1-65.

⁵⁹ Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales: J D FitzGerald Papers: *FitzGerald brothers circus, 1894-1907; Correspondence, 1894-1906*, MS.Q284.

⁶⁰ Anon, *The Outdoor Showman*, Oct 1961.

their employees. These interviews were recorded on tape and subsequently transcribed. Brief handwritten notes taken in the course of informal conversations augmented this collection. These interviews provide rich 'insider' perspectives on Australian circus in the period from the 1890s until the 1960s and extracts therefrom were liberally used throughout this text to support or illustrate various lines of thought.

- Monographs

Several works, specifically devoted to one aspect or other of Australia's popular entertainment history, have been published in recent years. An Adelaide journalist, Fred A Lord, enshrined the story of the Seymours, a family which travelled the backblocks of Australia with its small circus in the early 1900s, in his book *Little Big Top* (1961). In 1971, Nathalie Fernandez captured the 'saga' of the Ashton family in a book, although only one of its thirteen chapters was devoted to the 'early days', the detritus of the few memories to have survived five generations.⁶¹ To varying degrees, these works suggest, but do not explore, the importance of circus in Australia's emerging social fabric. In a documentary history of the Australian stage, Harold Love (1984) identifies circuses, many of which also offered equestrian-based dramatic entertainments in the tradition of Astley's in London, as an 'active and popular' rival to early colonial theatre.⁶²

Since the 1970s, the dearth of documentation and analysis of Australia's circus history has been steadily addressed. Works include: the first published general history of Australian circus by Geoff

⁶¹ N Fernandez, *Circus saga: Ashton's*, Sydney: Ashton's Circus, 1971, pp.15-25.

⁶² H Love, (ed.), *The Australian stage: a documentary history*, Sydney: U N S W Press, 1984, p.48.

Greaves (1980); a study of the Australian experience of circus children by John Ramsland (1994); a thoroughly researched study of the Ashton family and its circus by Judy Cannon (1997); a thesis on the colonial circus proprietor Henry Burton, by Nicola Brackertz (1997); John Whiteoak's study of improvisational practise in Australian music which coincidentally embraced Australian circus music practise (1999); and James Fogarty's detailed history of Wirths Circus (2000). Katharine Brisbane (1991) provides an extensive entry on the origins and early development of the Australian circus,⁶³ as does Philip Parsons (1995).⁶⁴ While many of these works have touched to varying degrees on the origins of circus in Australia, a comprehensive, definitive account of those origins is lacking. The most comprehensive published history of Australian circus to date, my *Spangles & Sawdust: The Circus in Australia* (1983), is 'a worthwhile achievement in the study of popular culture in Australia' but a perceived lack of academic rigour has qualified the work as no more than 'lightweight Australian history'.⁶⁵

- Newspapers & magazines

Illiteracy and itinerancy prevented the early generations of circus people from leaving accounts of their lives and careers. We know that circus people kept press books containing their newspaper 'write-ups' yet none have come to light, a void that can be filled by the time-consuming yet rewarding reconstruction of these write-ups from surviving contemporary newspapers. Were it not for a wealth of early Australian newspapers, often of an 'astonishingly high

⁶³ Brisbane, pp.44ff.

⁶⁴ P Parsons, (ed.), *Companion to theatre in Australia*, Sydney: Currency Press Pty Ltd in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp.138ff.

⁶⁵ R Fotheringham, 'Mark St Leon: Spangles & sawdust: the circus in Australia', in *Australasian Drama Studies*, Oct 1984, pp.146-48.

standard⁶⁶, only the barest of historical outlines of Australia's circus history could be reconstructed. From as early as the 1830s, Australia's journalists have documented the public image of circus, its historical outlines, origins and subsequent development, a comprehensive public record of their itineraries by day and date, by location and personnel. This 'time capsule' of Australia's circus history tells us much about the popular tastes, mores and values of eras now long past. Circus advertising was often highly detailed and documented for posterity the names of performers, the acts on an evening's programme, starting and finishing times of performances, admission prices, seating capacities of the old circus tents, names of proprietors, business managers and advance agents, and performance dates and places. Journalistic reports and criticism often give us a flavour or impression of the performance and, occasionally, valuable insights into the lives the circus people led. Observant journalists often captured the essence of an evening's circus performance with piquant accounts. They occasionally recorded incidents, observations and anecdotes concerning the passage of a circus through a district although only rarely the private lives of those caught up within the circus and their behind-the-scenes activities. This material today represents not only a unique catalogue of Australia's itinerant show business history but also an extraordinary bank of raw material capable of contributing to wider social, economic and cultural analysis.

- Ephemera

While there are occasional indications of the richness of circus ephemera produced over many years, much has either been lost or

⁶⁶ M Cannon, *Life in the country: Australia in the Victorian age, Volume 2*, Melbourne: Thomas Nelson (Australia) Ltd, 1973, p.253.

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awaits discovery. Close examination of known examples of ephemera – such as photographs, letterheads, programmes, handbills, tickets, account books and sheet music – adds to our understanding of circus in Australia.

- Correspondence

In the course of my enquiries into Australian circus, I have retained handwritten, typed and electronic correspondence received from circus family members, historians, genealogists, libraries and museums. Where warranted, information contained in these letters was incorporated into the text of this thesis.

- Civil records

While Australia lacks an archive specifically devoted to circus, documents held in/by Australia's public archives allow us to see something of Australian circus from an official perspective. The documents held include licensing records, insolvency papers, convict records, shipping lists, law reports and correspondence with civil authorities. The birth, marriage and death information held by Registrars-General, while not faultless, provides insight into family names and origins.

- Public collections

The National Library of Australia, Canberra, The Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, and the Performing Arts Museum, Melbourne, were consulted for their significant holdings of material relating to Australian circus. In the United States, archives such as the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin, the John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota,

Florida and the Billy Rose Theater Collection of the New York [City] Public Library, state of New York, were consulted for their significant documentation concerning the activities of Australian circus people in the United States and the activities of American circuses on Australian soil.

Methodology

I undertook considerable exploratory research into the Australian circus *a priori* as outlined in the Literature Review above. No formalised hypothesis was employed as a research method, other than insatiable curiosity. This research focussed largely on the period from the 1840s to the 1960s but, more especially, the period from about 1875 until about 1918. By the time I commenced work on this thesis in July 2003, much of this accumulated information had been subjected to preliminary categorisation, analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, I had already produced a number of works on aspects of circus in Australia and some of these, as detailed in Sources, were cited in the preparation of this thesis. I revisited and analysed this immense accumulated body of data to identify important themes in Australia's circus history and to systematically interpret data and establish the structure of the thesis.

Scope

For the specific purpose of this work, reliance is placed on the working definition of circus already provided, that is, *an organised sequence of equestrian and other performances given within a ring, surrounded by spectators, by a company of horses, riders, acrobats, clowns and performing animals*. However, in order to illustrate certain themes pertinent to circus, material representative of Wild West shows, sideshows, carnivals and menageries was also embraced since circus

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was often found in the company of these forms of entertainment. Since the 1970s, a bifurcation has produced a contemporary circus movement, devoid of animals and more theatrical in nature. This movement is treated, superficially at least, as part of an overall continuum.

Although the themes presented in this work are organised within the broad areas of society, enterprise and culture, this work is not intended to contribute to the formation of theoretical constructs in these areas, although it hopefully will contribute to such formations in due course.

This work covers principally the period from 1847 to 2006, from the establishment of Australia's first successful circus enterprise until the present time, although reference is also made to activities of a circus nature in Australia as early 1833 and in England as far back as the 18th century. However, since a broad, thematic approach was adopted in its preparation, this work should not be construed as a chronological history of circus in Australia even though elements of this chronology will be apparent. Furthermore, the work emphasises the period from 1847 until the 1960s, the decade that saw the demise of several of Australia's major circuses. More particularly, the strongest emphasis is given to the period stretching from the gold rushes of the 1850s until the 1920s, arguably the richest period in Australian circus history.

Limitations

Historical research involves studying, understanding and explaining past events in order to arrive at conclusions concerning causes,

effects or trends that may help to explain present events.⁶⁷ Due to the transient, marginalised nature of the subject matter and the paucity of prior examples of research and analysis, the application of these principles to an enquiry into Australian circus history are not straightforward. Despite the care taken in preparing this thesis and the earlier careful accumulation of the information upon which it is based, a number of limitations must inevitably be recognised in a work of this magnitude.

Possibly the most significant limitation to be recognised in a work grounded in contemporary reports of entertainment and the promotion thereof, is that descriptions of past events are unlikely to be completely objective and may be contaminated by the original writer's personal values and opinions.⁶⁸ For example, although Australia's colonial journalism was often of a very high quality, the early journalists were necessarily selective in the events and impressions they captured for posterity. A small but significant proportion appears to have harboured condescending 'Old World' attitudes towards circus and itinerant entertainments in general. On the other hand, advertising of circus programmes was often adulterated by 'puffing', the self-interested exaggeration of something's attractions beyond its merits.⁶⁹ In the late 1970s, letterheads and advertising for Ashtons Circus carried the spurious claim that the company was 'established [in] 1832'. During 1920 - 21, New Zealand billboard hoardings for St Leons Circus casually proclaimed the company's '83rd annual tour'. While these claims of longevity served commercially-induced imperatives of legitimacy

⁶⁷ L R Gay and P L Diehl, *Research methods for business and management*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992, p.13.

⁶⁸ D Cavallaro, *Critical and cultural theory*, London: The Athlone Press, 2001, p.189.

⁶⁹ R Cromie, (ed.), *Dictionary of the vulgar tongue: a dictionary of buckish slang, universal wit and pickpocket eloquence*, Northbridge: Digest Books Inc, 1971, n.p.

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and authenticity, the available public record readily disproves their substance. These unsubstantiated claims further suggest that the stories and events that shaped Australia's circus history had become progressively embellished, confused or discarded with the passage of generations and according to the exigencies of the moment.

While the names, events, dates, occupations, personal details yielded by archival and civil records may reinforce the historical picture, these records are often incomplete or inaccurate, contradictory or ambiguous. Furthermore, the paucity of original letters and extended works of autobiography deprive the circus historian of expert accounts and contemporary insights into human action and intercourse within the circus community.

Despite the oral traditions of the Australian circus, documented oral sources prior to the current era are few. Although Australia's circus history was embodied in the thought and action of its participants, rarely were *their* thoughts and *their* actions captured in *their* words, much less subjected to the scrutiny that the history of circus had received in Europe and the United States. The London and Launceston origins of Australian circus, as well as associated names, dates and events, had largely passed from living memory by the 1970s when the first interviews were conducted with elderly circus people, already two and three generations removed from the people and events of its formative period. *Their* knowledge of the achievements of earlier generations, and the broad outlines of *their* heritage, were sketchy at best. When questioned over the origins of their respective families in circus, elderly Australian circus people gave similar responses.

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No, I wouldn't know. That's as far back as I can remember. My father used to tell me about starting from the Northampton Downs Hotel [but nothing else].⁷⁰ [*Perry Brothers Circus*].

There were a lot of arguments as to who had the first circus in Australia but it never worried us actually. We been in the business long enough. We were born in it.⁷¹ [*Sole Brothers Circus*].

[Dad] never talked to us boys much. Mum never even told us ... No, never used to tell us anything.⁷² [*St Leon Brothers Circus*].

Therefore, I have used oral material selectively to support particular assertions or themes and have left the original speaker's choice of words unaltered. The use of oral material has been minimised as far as possible but my narrative is shaped, heavily in a few areas, by evocative primary quotations. A few quoted remarks which may give some people cause for offence or embarrassment have been included on the grounds that they served the thrust and higher purpose of the more generalised argument contained in the narrative.

Objectivity

Among Australia's circus people, the oral word prevailed over the written. The itinerant life, paucity of education, word-of-mouth and a simple lack of scholarly concern, meant that few circus people committed their experiences to posterity or preserved documentary evidence. Although handwriting samples suggest that a few, at least, received superior standards of education for their day, for many circus people education was rudimentary.

⁷⁰ M Perry, in M St Leon, *Australian circus reminiscences*, Sydney: The Author, 1984, p.192

⁷¹ M Lindsay, in St Leon, 1984, p.117.

⁷² A St Leon, in St Leon, 1984, p.91.

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The founder of the St Leon circus, my great-great-grandfather, an acrobat, equestrian and circus proprietor, originally named John Jones, attended a Church of England Sunday School as a youth in London's Westminster in the 1830s where he learned to read passages from the Bible. Reaching adulthood, he 'could read printed letters, but not handwriting'⁷³ and appears to have not committed anything to paper beyond his own signature. It was claimed that he 'was the first circus proprietor to take a menagerie of ... animals to Australia'⁷⁴: in fact, as John Jones, a London tumbler, he experienced the misfortune of transportation to Van Diemen's Land, only to resurrect his career in an antipodean setting, once free, eventually to establish in 1875 a circus - St Leons Circus - that became a 'power in the land'.⁷⁵

Thus was the identity of the St Leon family and its origins in circus obscured with the passage of generations. By 1920, the family name, by then widely recognisable in show business in both Australia and the United States, was touted as 'authentic' and 'French',⁷⁶ misinformation that was given further circulation in the years to follow.⁷⁷ In fact, the name was a *nom d'arena*, first deployed when Jones and his sons were presented as The St Leon Troupe at the Theatre Royal, Melbourne in 1865.⁷⁸ By the mid-20th century, the family's convict origins, circus associations and assumed name were sources of embarrassment and awkwardness for those of the St Leon progeny whose outward values, lifestyle, credentials and

⁷³ T H Lynn, in St Leon, 1984, p.68.

⁷⁴ *New York Dramatic Herald*, 15 Feb 1920.

⁷⁵ *Bulletin*, 16 May 1903.

⁷⁶ *New York Dramatic Herald*, 15 Feb 1920.

⁷⁷ H R Graham, letter to the editor, *The Outdoor Showman*, Jan-Feb 1961, p.3.

⁷⁸ *Argus*, 27 Jan 1865.

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material circumstances were now aligned with the bourgeois. Interviewed in New Zealand in 1961 in his capacity as advance agent for Bullen Brothers Circus, my grandfather, Norman St Leon (1888-1963), after a lifetime in the circus, was asked if any of his family were still 'in the business'. He replied:

No sir, I made sure my son wouldn't join the circus life. He's been flying for Qantas for some years now, and there he has as many thrills as he would get in the circus.⁷⁹

In 1989, Norman's son gave his recollections of the St Leon family and its circus. He said, talking of his great-grandfather, Matthew St Leon, the founder of the family circus:

[I was told that] ... he was a stable boy to King George IV, and had been given money or was superannuated to come out to Australia ... My father told me that his grandfather's name was Matthew St Leon. Obviously they were never too keen on letting anybody know that he had been a convict. I certainly didn't know. As a matter of fact, I really didn't know that the name of St Leon wasn't accurate until a fairly recent date, although I had my suspicions that it probably had been taken for theatrical purposes. My father never told me.⁸⁰

I am to some extent an insider in the world of Australian circus by virtue of my name and ancestry. This status facilitated access to other St Leon descendants and conferred some 'open sesame' privileges in approaching other Australian circus families and recording their recollections. It will be apparent that this thesis contains abundant references to the St Leon family and its circus and clearly more

⁷⁹ Anon, 'With circus for 72 years', in *The Outdoor Showman*, Jan-Feb 1961, p.16.

⁸⁰ N V St Leon, in *St Leon*, 1984, p.333.

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references to the St Leons than any other Australian circus family. This reflects a number of inescapable facts: the St Leon family and its circus were the primary focus research that I have undertaken since 1969; the St Leon family played a significant role in Australian circus from the late 1840s until the early 1960s; and relatively few other Australian circus families have had their own histories as comprehensively documented, whether on the public or private record. It could be asserted that my St Leon origins will lead to biased perspectives in discriminating between available material and conflicting opinions, or a subliminal desire to interpret data in a way that will enhance the reputation of the author's family in circus, relative to other families. During the preparation of this thesis I have kept this potential problem in mind and have endeavoured to use all material as objectively as possible.

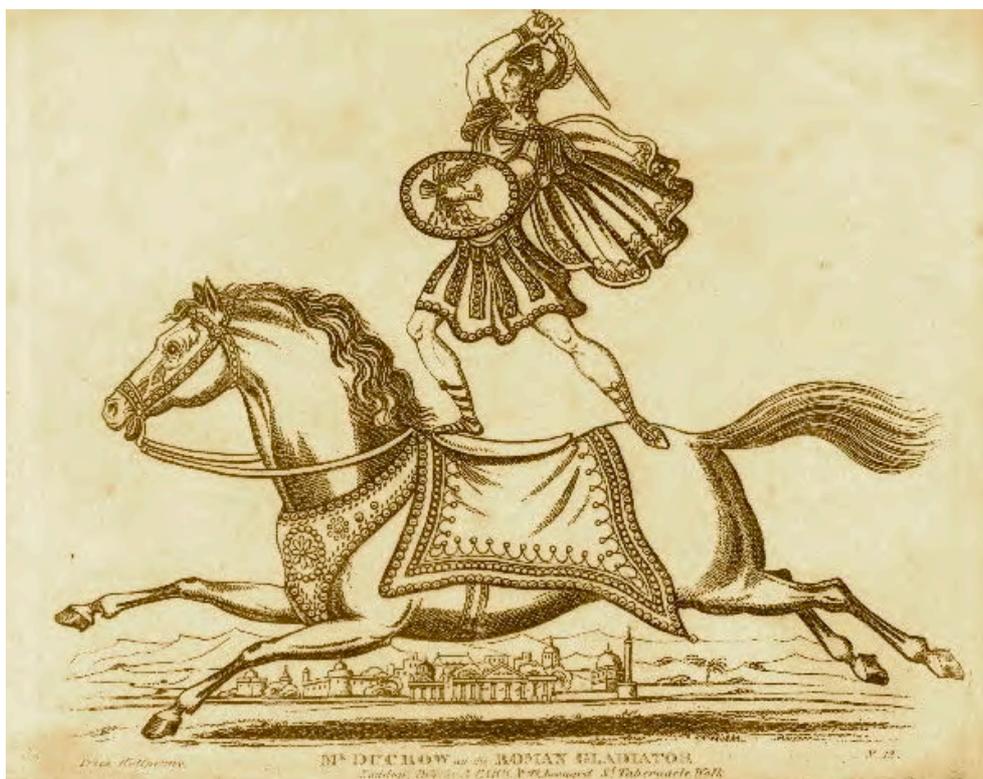


Figure 1

Mr Ducrow as the Roman Gladiator. A half penny juvenile portrait, published by A.Park, London, c.1840. Author's collection.