

**THE RINGLING P.T. BARNUM COLLECTION, 1845-1890**

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**Overview**

Repository	Archives The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art 5401 Bay Shore Road Sarasota, FL 34243
Creator	The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art
Title	The Ringling P.T. Barnum Collection
Dates	1845-1890
Physical Description	.4 linear feet, 40 items, 1 box
Language	English
Arrangement	The collection is arranged by type of record
Summary	This collection consists of records and visual materials relating to P.T. Barnum, his personal life and professional endeavors. The records include correspondence, portraits, autographs, advertisements, and letterhead.

**Administrative Information**

**Provenance**

The collection was assembled by the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art with items contributed by individual donors.

**Information about Access**

The P.T Barnum Collection may be viewed by appointment. Use of certain materials is restricted by statute, by the office of origin, or by the donor. For the protection of its collections, the Archives also reserves the right to restrict access to records which are not arranged, are being processed, or are exceptionally valuable or fragile. In some cases, copies may be substituted for the originals.

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**Cite As**

Credit must be given for any use of materials. The credit line should read: The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Florida State University, P.T. Barnum collection, and should include the box and folder listing.

**Processing Note**

Processed by M. Ellison in July 2016, finding aid created by M. Ellison in July 2016. Parts of the collection have been digitized and are catalogued and available through ~~in~~ eMuseum, The Museum System (TMS) on the museum's website.

**Biographical Note**

P. T. (Phineas Taylor) Barnum was involved in a variety of business pursuits, most famously Barnum's American Museum and the circus. He was born 1810 in Bethel, Connecticut. In 1829,

he married Charity Hallett. They had three daughters that lived to adulthood; Caroline Barnum, Helen Barnum (married to Samul H. Hurd and William H. Buchtel), and Pauline Barnum (married to Nathan Seeley). Before entering show business, Barnum tried a variety of commercial pursuits including the grocery business and the running of a lottery.

Barnum began his career as a showman by displaying Joice Heth, an elderly woman whom he claimed was the nurse of George Washington. In 1841, Barnum opened Barnum's American Museum in New York City. The museum displayed a combination of objects, human curiosities, and animals. In 1842, Barnum displayed the "Fejee Mermaid", a famous humbug. Later that year, he met the young midget Charles Stratton, later known as General Tom Thumb, and began to display Stratton in his museum, Barnum took General Tom Thumb on a highly successful tour through Europe in 1844. In 1848, Barnum's "Oriental villa" Iranistan was completed in Bridgeport, Connecticut. In 1850, Barnum sponsored the tour of the singer Jenny Lind, known as the "Swedish Nightingale", in order to legitimize his image. The tour was highly successful both financially and in terms of the refurbishment of Barnum's image as a respectable showman. In 1854, P.T. Barnum published the first edition of his autobiography, which he continued to revise and republish throughout his life. In 1856, Barnum declared bankruptcy and lost the museum. The next year Iranistan burnt down. In 1860, cleared of debt, Barnum reacquired the museum. He also built a new home for himself called Lindencroft. Barnum's American Museum burned down in 1865 and, after rebuilding and reopening, it burned down again in 1868, this time closing forever. Barnum built a house in Bridgeport in 1869, calling it Waldemere.

In 1870, Barnum partnered with W.C. Coup and Dan Castello to put on a new traveling circus. The circus was incredibly successful in its first season. Barnum displayed human curiosities and animals along with the circus, much as he had with his museum. In 1873, Barnum's wife Charity died and less than four months later, he remarried the much younger Nancy Fish. In 1876, Barnum dissolved his partnership with Coup and joined another company, forming "The Greatest Show on Earth". In 1880, he partnered with J.A. Bailey and James L. Hutchinson, creating "P.T. Barnum's Great London Combined." In 1881, Barnum acquired the African elephant Jumbo from the London Zoo. Jumbo became a phenomena in the United States until his death in 1885. In 1887, Barnum and J.A. Bailey became equal partners in the "Barnum and Bailey Circus." In 1889, an elderly Barnum decided to build a house for Nancy right next to Waldemere, which was then torn down. The new house was called Marina. After a stroke in 1890 confined him to the house, P.T. Barnum died on April 7<sup>th</sup> 1891.

### Scope and Content Note

This collection was artificially created with the individual items donated to the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. It ranges from Barnum's early life to his involvement with the circus and addresses both his personal and professional life. The collection contains correspondence, visual materials, letterhead, and miscellaneous documents. The most notable items in the

collection are Barnum’s letters to his taxidermist, Professor Ward, and the illustration of P.T. Barnum as a Humbug. Some of the materials have been cataloged and digitized in the Museum collections database and are available through the Ringling Collections portal. For items that have been digitized, the TMS object number is noted (ht#####).

## Related Materials

Barnum Circus Papers 1867-1918 at the Circus World Museum  
 The Barnum Museum  
 The Circus Collection at the Harry Ransom Center  
 Princeton University Library, Theatre Collection  
 Programs and Route books at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art  
 P.T. Barnum collection, 1840-1890 at New-York Historical Society  
 Tibbals P.T. Barnum collection at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art  
 Tibbals Booklet Collection at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art  
 Tufts University, Archives and Special Collections (Barnum collection)

## Subject Headings

Barnum's American Museum  
 Barnum, P. T. (Phineas Taylor), 1810-1891  
 Barnum, P. T. (Phineas Taylor), 1810-1891—Correspondence  
 Circus  
 Circus—History  
 Circus owners--United States  
 Circus owners--United States—Correspondence

## Contents of the Collection

Box	Box Title	Folder no.	Folder Title
1	Correspondence, 1845-1886		
		1	P.T. Barnum and John Moody to George Clarke, 1835, ht7300061
		2	P.T. Barnum to Edward Everett, 1845, ht7300062
		3	P.T. Barnum to Charles and Scribner, 1856, ht7300063
		4	P.T. Barnum to H.B. Curtis, 1861, ht7300064
		5	P.T. Barnum to Curtis, 1862, ht7300065
		6	P.T. Barnum to Belmont Perry, 1868, ht7300066
		7	Horace Greely to P.T. Barnum, 1870, ht7300067
		8	P.T. Barnum to Eddie Strickland, 1871, ht7300068
		9	P.T. Barnum to C.N. White, 1872, ht7300069

- 10 P.T. Barnum to Rev. Emerson, 1881, ht7300070
- 11 P.T. Barnum to Rev. Emerson, 1885, ht7300071
- 12 P.T. Barnum to Professor Ward, 1886, ht7300072
- 13 P.T. Barnum to Rev. Alex McMillan, 1886, ht7300073
- 14 P.T. Barnum to Professor Ward, 1886, ht7300074

## 2 Visuals, 1851- unknown

- 1 Illustration of P.T. Barnum as a “Humbug” from “Comic Natural History”, 1851, ht8003003
- 2 Portrait of P.T. Barnum, 1881, ht8003004
- 3 Portrait of P.T. Barnum for George Emerson, 1885, ht0005904
- 4 Wire screen catalog with photograph of the residence of P.T. Barnum, 1892
- 5 Portrait of Philo Barnum, father of P.T. Barnum, date unknown, ht0005905
- 6 Portrait of sister of P.T. Barnum, date unknown, ht0005906
- 7 Portrait of Dr. Emerson, date unknown, ht0005907
- 8 Portrait P.T. Barnum, date unknown, ht8003005
- 9 Portrait of P.T. Barnum, date unknown, ht0005908
- 10 Portraits of P.T. Barnum and James A. Bailey, date unknown
- 11 Photograph of Barnum etching and Barnum tomb, date unknown

## 3 Letterhead, unknown-1890

- 1 Barnum’s Great Museum, Menagerie and Circus envelope, unknown, ht7001238
- 2 P.T. Barnum’s Greatest Show on Earth and the Great London Circus Combined, ca. 1880-1889, ht7001239
- 3 P.T. Barnum’s Greatest Show on Earth, 1890, ht7001240

## 4 Miscellaneous, 1854-date unknown

- 1 Pass for the World’s Industrial Exhibition for James Smith and Lady of the Sunday Courier, 1854
- 2 Advertisement for Barnum lecture, 1866
- 3 Autograph book with P.T. Barnum autograph, 1878

- 4 Barnum and London Show, railroad badge, ca1881
- 5 P.T. Barnum autograph, 1886
- 6 Life of P.T. Barnum, 1886
- 7 P.T. Barnum autograph and quote, 1887
- 8 P.T. Barnum business card, 1887
- 9 Barnum festival program, 1949
- 10 Struggles and Triumph by P.T. Barnum, salesman's copy, date unknown
- 11 Advertisement for Barnum autobiography, date unknown
- 12 Pass for Traveling World's Fair or my Roman Hippodrome, date unknown