

TIBBALS CIRCUS COLLECTION OF P.T. BARNUM PAPERS, 1850-1891

[Overview](#)
[Administrative Information](#)
[Biographical Note](#)
[Scope and Content Note](#)
[Related Records](#)
[Subject Headings](#)
[Contents of the Collection](#)

Overview

Repository	Archives The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art 5401 Bay Shore Road Sarasota, FL 34243
Creator	Tibbals, Howard C., 1936-2022
Title	Tibbals Circus Collection of P.T. Barnum Papers
Dates	1850-1891
Physical Description	2.5 linear feet, 118 items, 7 boxes
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, letterhead, land deeds, checks, illustrations, autographs, advertisements, and portraits.

Administrative Information

Provenance	From the collection of Howard Tibbals. Howard Tibbals purchased each of these items from Barnum family members and individual sellers.
Information about Access	Howard Tibbals P.T Barnum files 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.
Ownership and Copyright	Copyright has been transferred to The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art for unpublished materials authored or otherwise produced by the creator(s) of this collection. Copyright status for other collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.
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, Tibbals Circus Collection of P.T. Barnum Papers, and should include the box and folder listing.
Processing Note	Processed by M. Ellison in June 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 7th 1891.

Scope and Content Note

The collection was artificially created through the purchases of Howard Tibbals. The collection ranges from Barnum's early years when he owned Barnum's American Museum to the end of his life and addresses both Barnum's personal and professional life. This collection contains a wide

variety of records. The majority of the collection is outgoing correspondence, a mixture of personal and business. Notable letters include the letters to Oscar Kohn, a purchaser and manager at Barnum's American Museum, letters to W.C. Coup, and letters to Commodore Nutt and his mother. The remaining records include a mixture of business records, portraits of P.T. Barnum, letterhead, and miscellaneous documents. Of note amongst the business records is the summary of the title to Barnum's New York property and a petition on Barnum's behalf to the King of Burma. The majority of the collection does not deal with Barnum's circus business but rather with his museum and other business affairs.

Some materials have been cataloged and digitized in the Museum collections database and are available online through the Ringling Collections portal.

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

The 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

Coup, William Cameron, 1857-1895

Contents of the Collection

Box	Box Title	Folder no.	Folder Title
1	Business records, ca. 1851-1888		

1. Contract, P.T. Barnum and stage manager, C.W. Clarke, ca. 1851
2. Warrantee deed, Henry Osborne in favor of P.T. Barnum, 1856
3. Warrantee deed, Mr. and Mrs. Lobdell in favor of P.T. Barnum and William H. Noble, 1852
4. Deed from Seth Jones in favor of P.T. Barnum and quit claim by Seth Jones, 1852, 1855
5. Broadway bank checks for S.H Hurd, 1865
6. Abstract of title to P.T. Barnum, New York City Property, 1866
7. Note re. P.T. Barnum conveyance of deed to S.H. Hurd, ca. 1867
8. Abstract of title for mortgage loan, New York City Property, 1867
9. Abstract of title, New York City Property, 1867
10. Water bill for New York properties, 1875
11. Special time card No. 2 for extra trains, 1876
12. Petition to the King of Burma, 1883
13. Unknown note with list, 1888
14. Notes regarding a loan from Barnum to illegible, undated

2

Correspondence, 1850-1890

1. P.T. Barnum to Mr. Gowan's Clerk, ca. 1850-1891, ht7300000
2. P.T. Barnum to Samuel Hurd, 1850, ht7300001
3. P.T. Barnum to W.E. Parkhurst, 1854, ht7300002
4. P.T. Barnum to Ballou, 1854, ht7300003
5. P.T. Barnum to Charles Anderson, 1855, ht7300004
6. P.T. Barnum to Charles Hemley, 1855, ht7300005
7. P.T. Barnum to Buckstone, 1856, ht7300006
8. P.T. Barnum to George Routledge, 1859, ht7300007
9. P.T. Barnum to illegible, 1859, ht7300008
10. P.T. Barnum to unknown, 1860, ht7300009
11. P.T. Barnum to Oscar Kohn, 1861, ht7300010
12. P.T. Barnum to Buettell, 1862, ht7300011
13. P.T. Barnum to Commodore Nutt, 1864, ht7300012
14. P.T. Barnum to Rodinia Nutt, 1864, ht7300013.
ht7300014

15. P.T. Barnum to Smith, 1864, ht7300015
16. P.T. Barnum to Dr. Hoyt, 1864, ht7300016
17. P.T. Barnum to J.E. Burger, 1865, ht7300017
18. P.T. Barnum to James Boyle, 1865, ht7300018
19. P.T. Barnum to Robert Brant, 1866, ht7300019
20. P.T. Barnum to Moses, ca. 1866-1867, ht7300020
21. P.T. Barnum to Moses. H. Grinnell, 1869, ht7300021
22. John C. Talcott to P.T. Barnum and reply, 1872,
ht7300022
23. P.T. Barnum to Oscar Kohn, 1872, ht7300023
24. P.T. Barnum to unknown, 1872, ht7300024
25. P.T. Barnum to Oscar Kohn, 1872, ht7300025
26. P.T. Barnum to Oscar Kohn, 1873, ht7300026
27. P.T. Barnum to Oscar Kohn, 1873, ht7300027
28. M.L. Perry to P.T. Barnum, 1873, ht7300028
29. P.T. Barnum to Rodinia Nutt, 1873, ht7300029
30. P.T. Barnum to Commodore Nutt, 1874, ht7300030
31. P.T. Barnum to Major Nutt, 1874, ht7300031
32. George S. Bowen to P.T. Barnum 1874, ht7300032
33. P.T. Barnum to Oscar Kohn, 1875, ht7300033
34. P.T. Barnum to Oscar Kohn, 1875, ht7300034
35. P.T. Barnum to George Bowen, 1875, ht7300035
36. P.T. Barnum to Wallace Brittany, 1878, ht7300036
37. P.T. Barnum to Hiram Peck, 1881, ht7300037
38. P.T. Barnum to Edward Collings, 1881, ht7300038
39. P.T. Barnum to H.M. Breuster, 1882, ht7300039
40. P.T. Barnum to unknown, 1882, ht7300040
41. P.T. Barnum to unknown, 1882, ht7300041
42. Merrick Phelps to P.T. Barnum, 1884, ht7300042
43. P.T. Barnum to illegible, 1884, ht7300043
44. P.T. Barnum to Helen Connell, 1884, ht7300044
45. P.T. Barnum to illegible, 1885, ht7300045
46. P.T. Barnum to President and Director of City National
Bank, 1887, ht7300046
47. P.T. Barnum to Bundit North, 1888, ht7300047
48. P.T. Barnum to John Stuart, 1888, ht7300048
49. P.T. Barnum to illegible, 1888, ht7300049
50. P.T. Barnum to Bonnelle, 1888, ht7300050
51. P.T. Barnum to Publisher of the Globe, 1889, ht7300051
52. P.T. Barnum to Erickson, 1889, ht7300052

53. P.T. Barnum to Firth, 1889, ht7300053
54. P.T. Barnum to unknown, 1889, ht7300054
55. P.T. Barnum to Faulkner, 1890, ht7300055
56. P.T. Barnum to Geuts, 1890, ht7300056
57. P.T. Barnum to unknown, ca. 1890, ht7300057
58. Nancy Barnum to Mr. Bok, 1891

3 Coup Correspondence, 1870-1885

1. P.T. Barnum to W.C. Coup, 1870, ht7300058
2. P.T. Barnum to W.C. Coup, 1870, ht7300059
3. P.T. Barnum to W.C. Coup, 1885, ht7300060

4 Visuals, ca1848-ca1891

1. Photograph of print of Iranistan, ca. 1848-1857
2. Illustration of the Oriental Villa of Mr. Barnum, page from unknown book, ca. 1848-1857, ht8003000
3. An illustration of "the Chinese Collection" from unknown museum, ca. 1849
4. Illustration of Barnum's American Museum, ca1865
5. Print of P.T. Barnum's portrait with signature, 1888, ht0005901
6. Map of Bridgeport, Connecticut, Barnum Property, ca. 1890
7. Prints of P.T. Barnum's portrait, date unknown, ht8003001
8. Oval photograph of P.T. Barnum, date unknown, ht0005900
9. Photograph of P.T. Barnum, date unknown, ht8003002
10. Photograph of P.T. Barnum by F. Gotekunst, date unknown, ht0005902
11. Print of portrait of P.T. Barnum, date unknown, ht0005903

5 Letterhead, ca1860-ca1890

1. Barnum's American Museum, envelope, ca. 1860, ht7000135
2. P.T. Barnum's Marvelous Drawing-Room Aggregation, 1870, ht7000136

3. P.T. Barnum's Great Roman Hippodrome, 1874, ht7000137
4. P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth and the Great London Circus, envelope, ca. 1876-1880, ht7000142
5. P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth and the Great London Circus, envelope, addressed to H.M Brewster, Springfield, Massachusetts, ca. 1876-1880, ht7001235
6. P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth and the Great London Circus, envelope addressed to Joseph McCaddon, Cincinnati, Ohio, ca. 1876-1880, ht7001236
7. P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth, 1878, ht7000139
8. P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth and the Great London Circus, Combined, ca. 1880-1889, ht7000138
9. Barnum & London Ten United Monster Shows, ca. 1881-1888, ht7001237
10. P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth, the Great London Circus, ca. 1884, ht7000144
11. P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth and the Great London Circus, ca. 1884, ht7000140
12. P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth combined with the Great London Circus, ca. 1884, ht7000141
13. P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth, and Great London Circus and Adam Forepaugh's Colossal Aggregation, 1887, ht7000143
14. The Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth, ca. 1890, ht7000146
15. P.T. Barnum's Office, date unknown, ht7000134

6

Miscellaneous, 1842-unknown

1. "Ten Thousand Chinese Things": a descriptive catalogue of the Chinese collection, now exhibiting at St. George's place, Hyde Park corner, London, 1842
2. 3 blank P.T. Barnum checks from Bridgeport bank, 1849
3. Admit Plummer and friend to P.T. Barnum's private box, ca. 1866-1867
4. P.T. Barnum's autograph, 1873
5. P.T. Barnum's autograph, 1876
6. P.T. Barnum's autograph, 1884
7. Calling card of P.T. Barnum to admit Bea and Mr. Jukes

in museum department and show, 1891

8. Obituary of P.T. Barnum from unknown newspaper, 1891
9. Program for the funeral service of P.T. Barnum, 1891
10. Photocopy of the Church Recorder, records births of the children of Pauline Taylor Barnum and Nathan Seeley and of the children of Phineas Taylor Barnum and Charity Wright, date unknown

7

Oversized materials, 1879-1934

1. Advertisement for P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth, 1879
2. The Mighty Barnum movie advertisement, 1934