

# Locals couldn't resist when circus came to town

"Circus - A place where horses, ponies and elephants are permitted to see men, women and children acting the fool." — Ambrose Bierce

Now there is a cynical view from Bierce of a happening that was looked forward to with great anticipation by young and old alike — the circus coming to town.

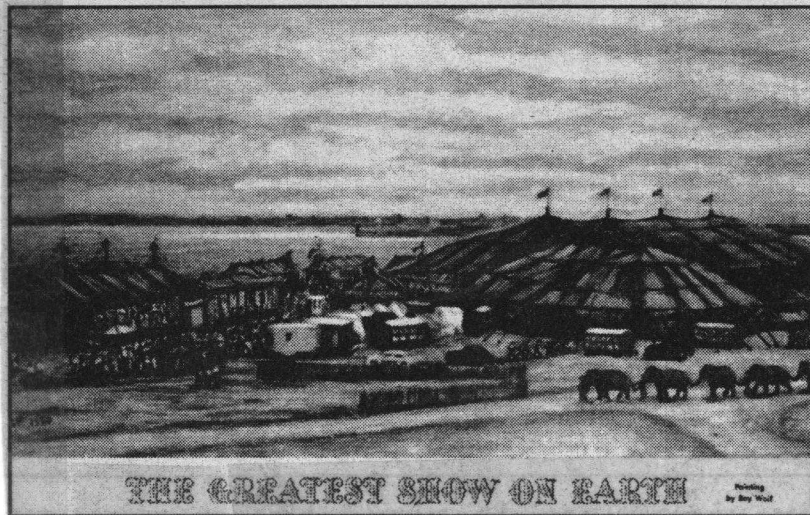
In September of 1890 John Robinson's great show was soon to appear in Watsonville at West Beach and Walker Streets and many adver-



**Betty  
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**That was  
Watsonville**

tisements filled the Pajaronian such as the following:



"Robinson's circus would not be the original article to the newspaper fraternity if the popular manager and clown, John Lowlow, was not with the show. He has traveled with the Robinson circus over thirty years, and always manages to do most of the hard work. Mr. Lowlow has no superior in his profession, and above all is every inch a gentleman." — The Pajaronian, Sept. 11, 1890

There were four "monster" trains; 60 special cars and a big parade down Main street every morning with wild animals and gaudily dressed people of the circus parading down Main Street. The performances were at 1 and 7 p.m. in four full-sized circus rings with three monster menageries. Touted as the oldest (66 years) and best show on earth it advertised a "vivid, electrifying and amazingly realistic wild west exposition. Over 1,000 men, women, and horses with an immense hippodrome track enclosing the whole operation."

There were chariot races, steeple chases, obstacle races plus Solomon, his temple and the Queen



of Sheba. Also to be seen was a pantomime of Humpty-Dumpty, his fortunes, misfortunes and mishaps. A galaxy of male and female stars were on hand to entertain and leave the crowd speechless and gasping for breath as they watched the daring and death defying acts.

Contrary to popular belief, the saying "The Show Must Go On" did not come from the theater but from

the circus world. More than 100 circuses were traveling around the country by the end of the 1880s and many a child dreamed of running away from home and joining the circus. Little did they know of the squalor, hard work and dangers of the circus world!

Over the years many circuses came to Watsonville. Setting up their tents in various parts of the town and having their colorful wag-

ons parading down Main Street with lions, horses and monkeys while clowns cavorted along the street to the delight of people on the sidewalks. The steam calliope wheezing tunes as it rolled along — how could local people resist flocking into the circus tents to see all the wondrous acts!

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