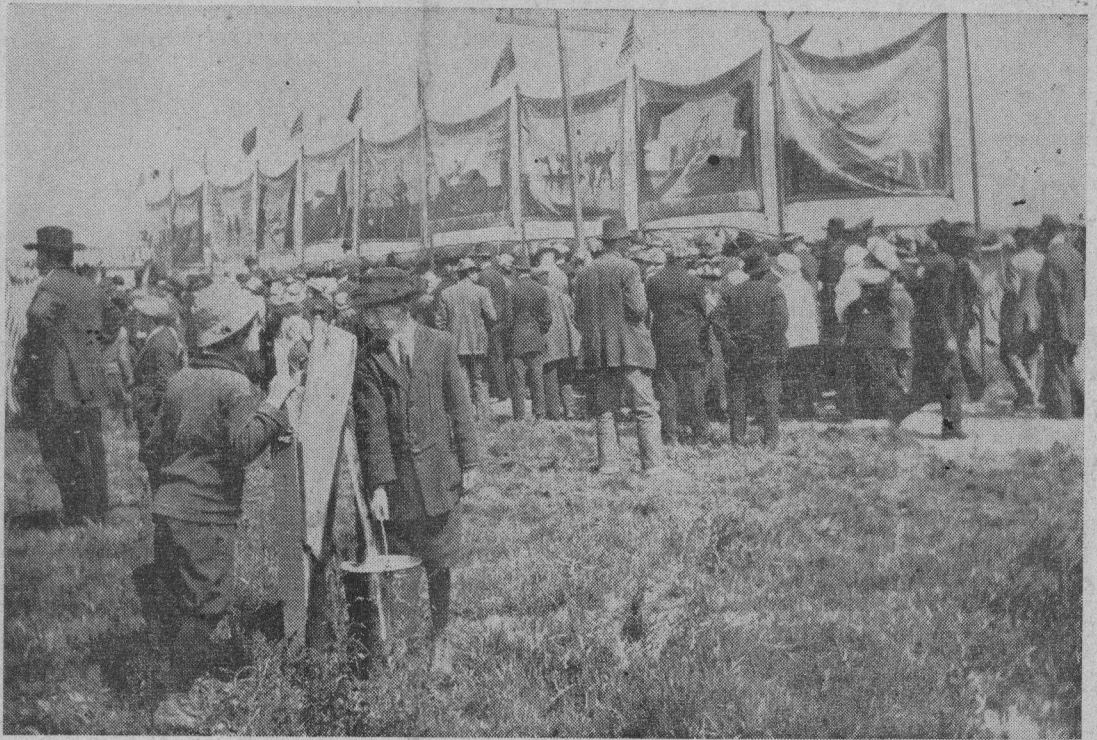


Santa Cruz Yesterday



CIRCUS TIME, 1915, NEAR THE BEACH

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

Santa Cruz did not have a circus this spring, with the Clyde Beatty show calling instead at Watsonville last Tuesday. Time will tell as to whether late summer or fall will deliver here for 1953 any "glittering aggregation of stars of the arena, both animal and man," or not.

Circuses, large and small, have been coming for a hundred years, occasionally at unusual dates, frequently in September, but principally in April or May.

An example of the early day shows appearing here was Stickney's Great Paris Exposition Circus, a wagon show. Said an ad in the Sentinel: "Will Exhibit in Santa Cruz, on Monday evening, May 18th, (1868) on the lot adjoining the new court house" (which burned in the fire of April, 1894).

Wagon Show

"Every performer a star", said the ad, continuing, "The procession will enter the city at 12 o'clock M., with chariot, four camels, mounted knights in armor, baggage wagons and extensive paraphernalia. Attached to this organization is Grant's Military Brass and String Band, conducted by Cunningham and Hahn".

This small circus of 85 years ago was a one-ring affair, apparently, with the accent on equestrian acts. But there were acrobats and gymnasts, together with trained mules, dogs and monkeys. It is interesting to note that the day and date of their appearance here is the same as this year, and compares with last Monday.

One of the earliest of which there is record was the South American Circus, appearing here on Friday and Saturday, June 5 & 6, 1857, "near the plaza". Boxes

were \$2; pit, \$1. On September 22 of the same year came the famed Pioneer Circus.

In 1870, on April 20, Gregory & Orrin's Circus appeared, followed on May 2 by Leighty, Lake & Co.'s Great Overland Circus (50 star performers; tent on lot west of Vine street, back of the Pacific Ocean House).

The San Francisco Circus & Collection of Performing Animals, with 17 star performers and Princess Mollie, the performing elephant, came down the coast from Pescadero to show here on June 29, 1874.

Queen's Circus

Montgomery Queen's well-remembered one-ring circus was here on May 1st in both 1875-76, spreading its canvas at the "Pacific avenue show grounds". Otherwise known as Cooper's lot, the property extended from near today's Rittenhouse building to the A. M. Peterson home, near the present Santa Cruz theater building.

It was entered from Pacific, but extended in an "L" toward Church street, beside the location of this paper's plant, taking in the present Leask parking lot.

Other early circuses, such as the W. W. Cole Electric Lighted, Sun Eclipsing Big Show of September 27, 1880, set up at Walnut and Chestnut avenues.

The Leibbrandt tract, near the beach, after some use of ground nearer the Casa del Rey location, became the principal showgrounds from around 1900 to about 1925. Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros. used the broad acres now given over almost entirely to streets and cottages.

Buffalo Bill brought his Wild West show to the tract in October, 1910, appearing in combination

with Sells-Floto in 1914 at old Bush League Park (now the High School Memorial Park), and the following year again at the beach.

The Barrett tract at Encinal street, off River, was used from the middle twenties until the Water street, at Market, grounds became available.

Circus Lot

A circus day at the Leibbrandt tract near the beach is depicted in the above picture, with crowds gathering about the sideshow display.

Two black-derbied ticket sellers are stationed before the freak show entrance waiting for the barkers to start a new display-spiel. The people milling about see on the numerous banners pictures of the Mermaid; Lalla Coolah, the Man-Woman; Pygmy Savages; Cigarette Fiend; Armless Wonder, etc.

In the left foreground two young local hopefuls are filling battered circus buckets, so they can "carry water to the elephants", as part of their effort to win a pass to the show. (Note their button shoes.)

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