

## Clowns and Cannons/ The American Circus During the Civil War

By William Lawrence Slout

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Dan Castello was another who ventured into **circus** proprietorship for the first time this year. With Matt VanVleck he put together a wagon show out of Fairplay, WI, Castello & VanVleck's Mammoth **Circus**, and opened in Dubuque, IA. Among the company were William Smith, two-horse rider; John Glenroy, somersault rider; Joseph Tinkham, hurdle rider; Charles Burrows, Richard Hammon, John Burns, and George M. Kelley, acrobats; Natt McCollum, banjoist and Ethiopian entertainer; and Frances Castello (probably Mrs. Dan Castello), rider. Castello and Tom Burgess were the clowns. M. VanVolkenburg was the manager; Tom Poland, master of the arena; and J. R. Murphy and L. VanVleck were ahead of the show. The trick horse, Monitor, and the educated bull, Don Juan, were featured. The successful summer tour took the **circus** through towns in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota. In the fall, VanVleck consolidated with **Maginley's Cosmopolitan Circus** for a winter season in a wooden amphitheatre in Memphis, where Ben Maginley was so popular, with the intention of producing horse dramas. Castello left the organization to break horses for a summer tour.

L. B. Lent's Equescriculum, which had reported good business in New York State in June—"never has the show business been so good as now; the country people are said to have plenty of money, and they turn out *en masse* to every show that comes along"<sup>9</sup>—nonetheless, moved into Canada by July and was very successful there.

**Maginley's Cosmopolitan Circus**, a new show, was launched in July by roly-poly Ben R. Maginley. This colorful gentleman, who was born of well-to-do Philadelphia parents, left home at age seventeen to join a dramatic stock company. During his stage career he performed in many of the major dramas of his time and developed into an experienced character actor. At the start of the war he was stage manager and low comedian in the New Memphis Theatre company at Memphis, TN. An unsuccessful investment in an arenic venture forced his entry into the **circus** business. He employed Oliver Bell to break horses for the establishment, who, within the short span of ten days, succeeded in making ring stock out of them. Maginley, a robust, hearty man of some two

hundred and forty pounds, entered the ring as clown for the first time on August 17, 1863.

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