



EN ROUTE  
TO THE GREAT  
EASTERN CIRCUS

WILLIAM  
L. SLOUT

# THE

William Slout's  
interesting  
post-Civil War

"En Route to the Great Eastern Circuit" is the creation of several papers put together on the North and South endeavor in Louisiana in Menagerie. "The Egg?" by T. Barnum

Slout's vivid newspaper traveling show

**WILLIAM L. SLOUT**  
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EN ROUTE TO THE GREAT EASTERN CIRCUIT

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first time in 1863. With Matthew VanVleck he put together a wagon show out of Fairplay, Wisconsin—Castello & VanVleck's Mammoth Circus. Richard VanVolkenburg was the manager; Tom Poland, master of the arena; and J. R. Murphy and L. VanVleck were ahead of the show. Castello's trick horse, Monitor, and his educated bull, Don Juan, were featured.<sup>32</sup>

After opening in Dubuque, the tour took the circus through territory in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota. In a return to Iowa in September, a late arrival at Keokuk necessitated the canceling of the matinee. The *Daily Gate City* reported that the performances were well attended and applauded their entertainment value. "The Wonderful educated horse, Monitor, manifested a wonderful degree of intelligence, seeming to understand every command and motion of his master. The trained bull, Don Juan, was a new feature in the ring performance and performed excellently."<sup>33</sup> Glenroy was with the show, riding both his somersault and two-horse act. He recalled this being one of the most successful tours he had ever had.

In October the company, which had been traveling by boat along the Ohio River, announced plans to reorganize in St. Louis for a tour of the South. This resulted in changing owners, the new ones being Matthew

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32. 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. Glenroy, p. 130.

33. Keokuk (IA) *The Daily Gate City*, September 21, 1863.

VanVleck, Ben Maginley and George W. DeHaven.

Maginley, soon to become a familiar figure in this narrative, was a roly-poly actor who had performed in the major theatres of his time. At the start of the war he was stage manager and low comedian with the Memphis theatre company. Very popular with local audiences, he took a farewell benefit on July 28. However, earlier in the month he had launched his own circus company, which first performed in Illinois towns and then returned to Memphis and into a newly erected wooden amphitheatre suitable for performances of horse dramas. This thirty-one-year-old robust actor, weighing some 240 pounds, entered the arena as a clown for the first time on August 17.

Maginley's company opened in Memphis on August 8 to a most friendly reception, as expressed by the *Daily Bulletin*.

“Mr. B. R. Maginley, the indomitable, has got up a new attraction, in the shape of a circus, which is at present all the go, and we can't see why it should not be, for if anything can be made to succeed, Maginley can make it. ‘Many thousands got in, and yet there were many thousands who tried and couldn't,’ as we heard a disappointed gentleman say, who tried, but couldn't.”<sup>34</sup>

It was this organization that combined with the VanVleck and DeHaven people to travel as Maginley &

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34. Memphis (TN) *Daily Bulletin*, August 11, 1863.

VanVleck's Cosmopolitan Circus, with DeHaven assuming the management. At this point Glenroy, still carrying resentment from the 1860 DeHaven debacle, turned in his notice. "I left," he wrote, "as I did not wish to travel in any company that DeHaven was interested in."<sup>35</sup> Dan Castello departed more diplomatically, "returning home to break horses for the next summer."

The first engagement of the new management team was in St. Louis beginning October 7. The circus played to good business, which prompted an announcement to remain for another week. The route ultimately led back to Memphis for October 29 through 31. It was then consolidated with Maginley's Cosmopolitan Circus for a winter season in the Memphis wooden amphitheatre.

Somewhere along the route, DeHaven disappeared, but the circus remained active. At mid-December the *Clipper* announced that "Maginley & VanVleck's Circus [continued] to hold forth at Memphis together with Henry Cooke's troupe of Trained Dogs and Monkeys, and [was] playing to crowded houses."<sup>36</sup>

We learn from Durand that in 1864 DeHaven went out in connection with Dan Castello's Great American Circus. The names of Moore and Gruber were mentioned, probably as the backers. A *Clipper* item listed the title of the company as "DeHaven &

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35. Glenroy, p. 132.

36. New York *Clipper*, December 19, 1863. To complete his move into the world of the circus, Ben Maginley married Marie Carroll, adopted daughter of two-horse rider W. B. "Barney" Carroll and equestrienne Mary Ann Carroll, at Memphis early in 1864.

week, opposite each other. Now I contradict this, for I am thoroughly acquainted with the receipts of each company. The above gentlemen and myself paid the internal revenue tax at the same time, and their receipts were \$15,000 from the time they left Chattanooga, Tenn., until the last day of their stay at Mobile, which was about three weeks or more. My receipts were \$4,000 at Mobile alone. I do not think they took any more money than I did in the five days in the last place. This statement I claim to be true, or else they made a false one to the tax collector.”

The letter was signed “A. Haight, Proprietor of G. W. DeHaven & Co.’s Circus.”<sup>71</sup>

Haight’s organization achieved the distinction of becoming the first to take a circus into Texas after the war. Following the date in Mobile, the former DeHaven’s United States Circus shipped out of New Orleans on the *Magnolia* for Galveston, arriving in time to set up their tents for the evening performance

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71. New York *Clipper*, March 2, 1912. Haight’s reaction was the result of an item in the *Mobile Daily Times* of December 15. “Amusement statistics—the books of the assessor and collector of the two percent tax for the United States revenue, on the gross receipts of exhibitions, enabling us to give the proceeds of the three circuses that exhibited here last month.... Thayer & Noyes paid two percent upon the receipts of \$15,453 for five days, commencing Nov. 14. DeHaven paid two percent upon the receipts of \$4,903.70, for six days, commencing Nov. 13. S. B. Howes paid two percent upon \$8,813.55, for two weeks commencing Nov. 20.” New York *Clipper*, February 17, 1912. There had been an ongoing feud between the organizations of S. B. Howes and Thayer & Noyes.

on Saturday, November 24. After sending their band out, the patrons, at \$1.00 each, crowded into the tent, a rush that amounted to a return of \$1,600, plus an additional \$400 from the minstrel sideshow. From billing the town on Sunday, the Monday take totaled \$2,200 and \$575; Tuesday, \$2,350 and \$600.

The company then went by rail to Houston for December 1, 2, 4, 5—Friday Saturday, Monday, Tuesday. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> the Houston edition of the Galveston *Daily News* carried this welcoming item.

“The Circus has Come! Hurrah! All the world, especially the juvenile portion, was in motion yesterday and last night to witness the magnificent performances of the Great United Circus Company. The unrivaled feats of Mlle. Marie, Signor Bliss, etc., commanded universal applause. ‘Old Sam Lathrop’ and his assistants gave their hearers many hearty laughs. Of course ‘Willie the Pet’ met with the approval of all. But go and see by all means and remove the wrinkles from your face.”

The paper was also commendatory in its view of the circus personnel. “The Company is gentlemanly throughout. A due regard is paid by them to refinement of taste. A Circus Company nearly always at once attracts or repulses the feelings of a community. This one has done the former perfectly; and their visit to the city will be remembered with pleasure.”<sup>72</sup>

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72. Galveston *Daily News*, December 2 and 3, 1865. “Willie the pet”

A letter to the *Clipper* from a member of the company, dated Red River, February 15, is an enlightening portrait of their situation.

“I now sit down to give you a little insight of our travels in Texas. We arrived in Galveston on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, and played there five days to overflowing houses; thence to Houston where we turned away people; took railroad to Richmond, and there hired transportation on through to San Antonio, where we played one week to crowded houses, including Sunday. We then bought some horses and hired the rest, and set out through the wilds of Texas on towards Shreveport, La., and of all countries this beats all. Talk of Hottentots, cannibals, barbarians! Here they are everything but civilized, whooping and hollowing, shooting, and all come to the show with pistols and knives; they shoot through the canvas, and call you names that are not very pleasant to hear, and we have to take it all. We had no fuss with them, as we dare not open our mouths. They shoot all around us as we go to and from the canvas. Once in a while we come across a man that knows something, but not often.

“We have now our own conveyances. Our admission here was \$1 in specie, or \$1.50 in greenbacks, though we don’t see many

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referred to the petite Master William, whom Barney Carroll used in his carrying act.



greenbacks, only where the Union soldiers are. For the horses, all we could get was corn, and poor at that. The horses all stand out doors. You can always find a shingle up at a grocery, go in and you will find a barrel of fighting whiskey made here, and it will kill two hundred yards at sight, also a few cards of gingerbread and some oysters.

“But after all we have made money, and eats, are paid every Sunday. Old man Haight pays up good; he is going to make a good showman; this is his first season. He started from Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, last April, and has run ever since....

“We had three horses stolen from us in Bellevue, first town out of Henderson. We opened in Shreveport, La., on Feb. 12<sup>th</sup>, after a long and tedious journey among the Yah-hoos and Gillipens, who would put a six-shooter in your mouth and ask you if that was good for a ticket, and one half the time in mud and the other half quarreling to get something to eat. We came out safe and sound and brought all our stock with us, but it was quite a difficulty on our part to do so.

“The company are all well, and start for Mobile Feb. 18<sup>th</sup>. Mrs. Maginley (Mary Carroll) is riding a splendid act better than ever, and has made a tremendous hit in Shreveport. Barney Carroll is with the company, and is looking

as young as ever, leaping over eight and nine horses every day. Ben Maginley made his first appearance in the ring at Shreveport, and made a hit as clown. The company consists of W. B. Carroll, Master Willie, Burdeau, Carr, Nayler Brothers, Bliss Family, P. H. Seaman and Cary, clowns; Billy Manning, Harry Blood, Alex. Prentice, John Somers, Master Hubert, Master Jimmy, W. A. Johnson, Mlle. Marie, and Mrs. Carroll.”<sup>73</sup>

At a March 7 date in Mobile, a benefit was given for the orphans of that city. One of the local papers was impressed with Barney Carroll’s carrying act.

“An extraordinary feature was introduced, which astonished the natives. A sweet little female hunchey-punchey, only fifteen months old, performed the wonderful feat of riding in different postures on the head, shoulders and arms of her father. She seemed to enjoy it hugely. She was seated on his hand at one time, and held out at arm’s length while the two horses galloped around at a lively speed. This act is the greatest ever witnessed in or out of the ring.”<sup>74</sup>

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73. New York *Clipper*, March 10, 1866, from a letter posted from Red River, February 15, 1866.

74. New York *Clipper*, March 24, 1866.

Haight took his agent, Doc C. S. T. Chambers, as partner to form an 1866 summer tour of Haight & Chambers Circus. The opening of a three-day stand at Atlanta on April 23 brought in a sum of \$1,500. A correspondent from the show stated,

“The representatives of Haight & Chambers’ United Circus made their first grand procession in this place yesterday, creating a greater furor, if possible, than that of Sherman’s, some time ago, the only difference being he taking the town by strategy, we by storm, for it did storm as if heaven and earth were at loggerheads.... The arena being lighted up with fluid, together with big, fat Ben Maginley’s gas—the only legitimate son of Momus in the biz—disclosed to our gaze hundreds upon hundreds of the fair damsels of the Sunny South, together with the bone and sinew, making it a spectacle not often seen in this country.”<sup>75</sup>

The company’s roster was similar to the previous year’s. The Carroll family was back, along with Maginley and wife, Marie. She still dazzled the audiences with her leap through a twenty-inch hoop, perhaps the only equestrienne in the country at this time to accomplish the feat. The Bliss family members were also repeats, Signor Bliss still exhibiting his ceiling walking skills. Alongside were Sam Rhinehart, ten-horse leaper and a somersaulter; Signor Farranta,

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75. New York *Clipper*, May 5, 1866.

quiet, order, and commendable absence of all rowdiness and vulgarity, speaks volumes of praise for the management, while the unexcelled performances by the meritorious corps of artists testify to their liberality and good taste.”<sup>76</sup>

Two days in Indianapolis followed, May 18-19. Then there were stops in Maryland and Virginia. Baltimore was visited for a week beginning August 30 at the Belair lot. The opening performance was well received by the *American and Commercial Advertiser*.

“This organization, depending solely on the merit of its performances, and not upon what is usually termed *gulling* the public, with a combined menagerie and circus, the menagerie consisting of nothing more than an exhibition of a few *antiquated fossils* in the form of lions, &c., has met with a proper and just success.”<sup>77</sup>

Washington, D. C., was booked for three days beginning on September 6. At Charlottesville, Virginia, where the show appeared on September 18, the company visited the grave of Job Foster, who had died while with Robinson & Eldred in 1851, and performed a respectful remembrance at the site.

A correspondent, writing from Oglethorpe, Georgia,

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76. Louisville (KY) *Daily Courier*, May 8 and 9, 1866.

77. Baltimore (MD) *American and Commercial Advertiser*, September 3, 1866.

Dan Monahan, master of horse.<sup>179</sup>

It was announced in the early *Clipper* that the show was to travel by rail using sixty-two cars. A later count by an Indianapolis reporter was fifty-four. According to him, there were two sleeping coaches for the actors, three box cars for the working men, two for “canvassers,” one for patent gas, one for properties, one for wardrobe, one for museum and refreshments, nine for the horses, and the remaining for the animals. There were two cages to a flat. The elephants were chained to a ringbolt fastened to the floor of the car. Both elephants and camels were required to get down on their knees to enter and leave the car.<sup>180</sup>

Still quoting from the *Clipper*, the street parade would display forty-one dens, twenty women on horseback, a steam calliope, three full brass and reed bands and a martial band. There was to be twelve tents using three separate entrances; and, as in 1872, a double circus performance in separate pavilions. Haight & Co. shared the privileges, for the most part with men already serving in other positions. Ben Maginley and Pete Gannen had the concert; W. W. Durand and J. L. Breese, the candy stands inside and outside; and Pat Harris, the sideshow. Herr Elijah Lengel was replaced this year by Agnes Lake, who performed as Mlle. Eugenie DeLorme; but was supported by H. Saunders, supposedly an English animal tamer. The stunt of having the various cats “loose” atop a parade wagon

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179. *Great Eastern Advance Herald*, 1873.

180. Indianapolis (IN) *Sentinel*, April 10, 1873.

