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SPALDING, DR. GILBERT R. (1812-April 6, 1880)

Born in Coeymans, Albany County, NY. Acquired the title of doctor because from about 1840 to 1845 was the proprietor of a drug and paint store, Albany, NY. About 1843, used Sam H. Nichols' circus as security of a loan; the show continued under Nichols' management until Spalding realized he was not about to recoup his money; visited the circus with the intention of bringing it to Albany and disposing of it; finding his management was paying off, and since he was enjoying the circus business, decided to keep the property for a while longer as Spalding's North American Circus. During 1847-48 season, visited New Orleans and moved northward up the Mississippi River. Arriving at St. Louis, divided the outfit into two shows, managing one with the original title, and putting **Dan Rice**, the famous clown, at the head of the other, with his brother-in-law, **Van Orden**, as manager. Latter company cruised the Ohio, Missouri and Mississippi Rivers in a chartered steamboat, the *Allegheny Mail*. Went into partnership with circus rider **Charles J. Rogers** at the end of 1848 season and the following spring the circus went on the road newly organized and equipped. Among the novel features presented for the first time was the Appolonicon, drawn by 40 horses, four abreast, and driven by one man. It is also stated that the show inaugurated the first use of "quarter poles" to supplement the "center poles" about 1850. Winter 1848-49, the Dan Rice show disbanded due to the cholera epidemic in the South. Spalding started Rice out again in the spring, 1849, in a land show. At the end of the season the outfit reverted to Spalding. Originated the river boat, *Floating Palace*, 1852, and moved up and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, at the same time operating a land circus. Performed in NYC during the indoor season, 1854-55. 1856, Spalding, Rogers & Bidwell took a 10 year lease of the Pelican Theatre, New Orleans, and refitted it for circus and dramatic performances, calling it Spalding & Rogers' Amphitheatre, and later renamed it the Academy of Music. Same year, inaugurated a railroad circus. For the next few years, Spalding & Rogers had 2 and sometimes 3 companies touring the United States and Canada, traveling by rail, wagon and water. 1860, put a circus and dramatic company into the Bowery Theatre, NYC, performing equestrian dramas. From there, moved to the Academy of Music, Boston. Spring 1862, the Ocean Circus was organized. Started from New York in March of that year with a magnificent portable amphitheatre constructed upon an entirely new plan. The brigantine *Hannah* had been purchased and fitted with accommodations for the company and the next 2 years were passed in Brazil, Uruguay, Buenos Ayres and the West Indies, with **Charles J. Rogers** as managing proprietor. Spalding remained in the USA. Early part of April, 1864, the company returned home, after a voyage of over 16,000 miles. Spalding & Rogers dissolved partnership, 1865, with Rogers retiring from professional life. Spalding & Bidwell continued, however; and shortly they leased the Olympic Theatre, St. Louis, as well as theatres in Mobile and Memphis, and established a theatrical circuit. A scheme was devised, 1867, to send a circus company to the Paris Exposition. The amphitheatre, wooden with a canvas top, was made by Mr. Kennedy of Albany, NY, accommodating 44 private boxes, besides an imperial loge, 760 parquet seats, 1,420 balcony seats, and a gallery capable of accommodating nearly 2,000 persons, the seats being all cane-bottom chairs. Investors - **Avery Smith**, **Gerard C. Quick**, **John J. Nathans**, and Spalding and **Bidwell** - chartered the large steamer, *Guiding Star*, to convey the company, horses, ponies, mules, a performing buffalo, wardrobe, trappings, and the portable amphitheatre to be put together in sections. **W. T. B. Van Orden** had been sent in advance to prepare the way. After arriving in Paris, and when nearly all the preparations for their opening had been

completed, it was discovered that a local law prevented the erection of any wooden building within the city limits; consequently they could not use their pavilion, but instead performed at the *Theatre Prince Imperiale*, in the *Rue Du Temps*. After 6 months in Paris, and 3 months at the Holborn Amphitheatre, London, they returned to the United States. 1872, Spalding again put Rice on the road with a company. Last venture in the circus business occurred, 1874-75, when he was co-proprietor with **John O'Brien** and **Ben Maginley** of Melville, Maginley & Cooke's Continental Circus and Thespian Company. Shortly, Spalding and Bidwell dissolved their partnership, with Bidwell retaining the Academy of Music, New Orleans, and Spalding the Olympic Theatre, St. Louis. Retired at his home in Saugerties, NY, 1879. Died of cystitis in New Orleans. Stuart Thayer called him a great innovator. He was the first showman to own his own steamboat; invented the quarter-pole; introduced the pipe organ as circus music with the addition of a parade wagon, the Apollonicon; constructed the first river boat to accommodate an entire circus organization; and had the first outfit to travel on its own railway cars, 1856.