

By David Wilson



The Amateur Circus at Nutley, drawn by P.S. Newell

Many charity events have been held in Nutley over the past decades including the well documented Nutley Amateur Circus benefitting the Red Cross League in 1894.

Eaton Stone owned quarry property on Kingsland Street where On3 is currently being developed and was famous for being able to throw a somersault from a bare-back horse. His love for the circus led to construction of a wooden pavilion with a sawdust floor and electric lights supplied by the Nichols power plant across the street.

The Red Cross was fresh off Johnstown Flood relief and was expanding their disaster and medical supplies services. Nutley's talented residents formed a committee to hold a one-day, one-ring circus utilizing local amateur and professional show people.

March 20th would be the date for an afternoon children's show and a three-hour nighttime adult event. People would sit on the soft side of pine boards that chilly day. Three hundred children accompanied by bona-fide nannies would be shuttled in stage coaches and carriages.

Publicity was by H.C. Bunner, editor of Puck Magazine, whose reputation ensured press releases appeared verbatim in New York publications and wealthy neighborhoods. Stockbroker Conrad H. Ray was called upon as a lightning fast ticket-seller, skills not needed when six hundred tickets sold out in advance. A special train ran from NYC and Newark to meet up with Montclair's society people.



Eaton Stone home, 1886

Nutleyites could be seen practicing acts on their front yards and attending daily meetings at the now white-washed and festooned tent. With Red Cross founder Clara Barton in attendance, organizers insisted the one-thousand-dollar goal be met, so no free passes. Peanuts, pink lemonade, and candy were sold by vendors using long sticks with baskets.

The show began with Professor Robinson's Original Circus Band leading a cavalcade of horses, acrobats, clowns, animal acts, trick riders, and performers.

The lady and gentlemen riders were Nutleyites, proud to show off their steeds and outfits. The New York and Orange Athletic Clubs performed ladder and trapeze acts. National Turnverein of Newark provided tumblers. Dr. Savage's gym sent hand balancers.

Nonstop action included bareback riders displaying their prowess with Robert Whittaker, the best in the country. Marsh Young appeared atop Magic and Monte Carlo driving them in tandem and performing acts of Haute 'Ecole (dressage movements).



Eaton Stone - The Wonder - Amateur Circus - 1894, Nutley NJ

Clowns kept people laughing with antics and jokes. Local children dressed in animal outfits. A fencing exhibition wowed the audience. Al Geer and instructor Mike Donovan boxed a few rounds. Prof. Hugh Leonard wrestled a well-known citizen billed as "The Unknown." Al Stirrat showed off his trained dog Sing Boo.

Famous Nutleyite Annie Oakley displayed her world-renowned shooting abilities atop Lady Surefoot, one of the all-time top circus horses. Annie showered the crowd with glass particles and gunpowder soot as she performed trick shots using glass balls.

The performance ended with the introduction of Prof. Ducrow's trick mules, Nip and Tuck. He challenged anyone in the world to ride them.



Eaton Stone Home and Quarry

These accounts and pictures are taken from the files of Town Historian John Demmer that include articles from Harper's Weekly, New York Times, The Evening World, and uncredited sources. Nutley continues to be an eclectic collection of personalities and talents coming together to create a community.

By David A. Wilson

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The Circus that Inspired a Town: The Nutley Amateur Circus with Nutley Museum Director, John Simko



New York Times, Sunday, March 4, 1894

Nutley To Have A Circus

Amateurs to Perform for the Benefit of the Red Cross League

The Nutley Amateur Circus is to be given on March 27. The proceeds will be for the purpose of founding a branch of the Red Cross League for the benefit of the citizens of Franklin Township.

The programme of the entertainment will be as follows: After the overture by Robinson's famous old band, for fifteen years with Barnum's Circus, there will be a grand entrée by lady and gentleman riders of Nutley. Then Prof. Doldt of the Orange Athletic Club will appear with seven performers in clever ladder and trapeze acts. Several bareback acts will follow. Then the national trio, belonging to the Newark Turn Verein, will do a brother act and much elaborate tumbling.

Mr. Marsh Young will then appear with his high school horses, Magic and Monte Carlo, drive tandem, and do other acts of the Haute Ecole. Interspersed among these performances will be exhibitions of fencing by some of the best-known champions of the graceful art: of boxing by Mr. Al Geer of Nutley and his instructor, Mike Donovan, and of wrestling by Prof. Hugh Leonard and a well-known citizen of Nutley.

Fred Runnels will be the clown and Prof. Ducrow ringmaster. Miss Annie Oakley is to shoot, and Eaton Stone, the first man who threw a somersault on horseback, will appear after twenty years' retirement from the ring.

There will be an afternoon performance for children under fifteen and bona-fide nurses only, from which the wrestling and boxing features will be eliminated. Stages will be run from all quarters of the township, and the location of their starting points will be announced later.

New York Times, Wednesday, March 28, 1894

Amateurs As Circus Performers

Money Made for the Red Cross League in Nutley, N.J.

NUTLEY, N.J., March 27. - Three hundred boys and girls thoroughly enjoyed themselves this afternoon at the amateur circus, and this evening a great crowd of their elders laughed at the antics of amateur clowns, applauded the fancy riding, bareback feats, ground and lofty tumbling, trained dogs, and all the other things that go to make up a first-class circus. The performance was given in the pavilion which Eaton Stone made of range lumber twenty years ago, and in which circus people and horses were trained.

The circus was held for the purpose of founding a branch of the Red Cross League in Franklin Township, the particular mission of which is to furnish poor people with sick-room appliances. Nearly \$1,000 was realized for the purpose.

The circus began, of course, with the "grand entree by gentlemen and lady riders," gracefully done by Messrs. Guy A. Ward, W. S. Conduit, T. Wilkie Satterthwaite, A. G. Badger, and Mrs. Guy A. Ward, Miss M. S. Vosburg, Mrs. A. H. Larkin, and Miss L. B. Valentine.

Then came in rapid succession ground and lofty tumbling by acrobats from the Orange Athletic Club, the New-York Athletic Club, and the National Turnverein of Newark; bareback riding and trapeze acts by C. O. Smith, who is an electrician in real life; E. Loyal Field and his wonderful troupe of trained animals, Master Lovibond, who were dressed up

as a monkey and a bear, and who did queer tricks which set the youngsters laughing with delight; pong hurdle acts by Master Al Stirrat, son of the Nutley livery stable proprietor, who learned at Dr. Savage's gymnasium how to pile a lot of bottles, one on top of another, and then get on top himself; "Fun in a circus," by Messers. Guy A. Ward, the real estate man, and W. Berg, the Wall Street broker, who were dressed as clowns, and who cracked a lot of jokes fresh from real circuses; a Romain-ladder act by members of the Orange Athletic Club, Messers. H. C. Marshall, L. M. Hoffman, A. S. Hoffman, R. E. Ballar, and J. E. Doldt; and some scientific boxing by Prof. "Mike" Donovan, Professor of Boxing at the New-York Athletic Club, and this pupil, Alpheus Geer, a Nutley lad. Several new features were introduced. Among those present were:

Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Tilton, Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Larkin, Mr. and Mrs. Steven Door, Mr. and Mrs. G. J. Malcom, Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Schuyler, G. H. Ray, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Day, Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Berg, Mr. and Mrs. Guy Ward, Mrs. and Mrs. F. Fowler, Mr. and Mrs. W. Neilson, Wentworth Conduit, R. H. Deakin, George Deakin, Mr. and Mrs. Stewart Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Harmon Brown, Mr. and Mrs. G. Goodrich.

Mr. And Mrs. W. H. Boardman, Mr. and Mrs. W. McMullen, Capt. and Mrs. Bailey, Mr. and Mrs. H. M. Bingham, James R. Hay, Fischer Satterthwaite, Mr. and Mrs. S Cortle, Mr. and Mrs. G. H. Bayne, Mr. and Mrs. F. Butler, Mr. and Mrs. G Small, Mr. Kenrick and the Misses Kenrick, Mr. and Mrs. J. Vernon Bouvier, Jr., and Mrs. T. Giles of Nutley and vicinity; Harry Enos, Charles Turner, E. J. Granini, and Charles Whitely of the New-York Athletic Club.

A. F. Timpson, "Gus" Timpson, Brewster Wylie, Horace Bradley, "Jack" Dallett of the Orange Athletic Club; F. M. Hutchins, who designed the programme; W. C. Gibson of Puck, G. Wilmerding, James L. Ford, James Barnes, Peter Kemble, H. L. Wilson, L. Dalrymple, H. C. Bunner, George B. Mallen, and Richard Kemble of The Cloister.

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- [Bunner](#)
- [Annie Oakley](#)
- [Eaton Stone](#)
- [Circus](#)
- [Red Cross](#)