

TRIBUTE TO GORDON TURNER

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351



At age 90, circus enthusiast **Gordon E. Turner** has created quite a legacy of circus models, videos, memorabilia, and band recordings. Now in a senior living facility in Lexington, South Carolina, his apartment is a show room of circus memories such that his apartment is one of the stops on the tour for prospective residents, demonstrating they can continue keeping their hobbies alive.



Gordie's career was 40 years (1954-1994) with the Advertising & Sales Promotion Department of General Electric Company in Schenectady, New York. He was a technical illustrator. His last 12 years of those were in their Patent office, with the last four as head of the drawing department. However, his vacations were the highlights over the years as he made himself generally useful as a show bum.

Being a talented model builder, he would travel to Circus World Museum and RBBB's Winter Quarters "graveyard" to

research circus wagons prior to replicating them in miniature form. Over the years Gordie constructed over one hundred models in various scales.

Hippo Wagon Model

22.5" L

8.5" W

11.4" H



As shown in the drawing Gordie is holding, he was especially fond of Big Otto, the featured hippopotamus at the Clyde Beatty - Cole Bros. Circus. He spent one vacation with that circus selling tickets to see the big hippo from the river Nile. He now loves doing drawings of some of his circus memories as shown here.



Of interest to Windjammers is Gordie's penchant for recording circus music whenever, and however, possible.

He is particularly pleased with having recorded the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey band during **Merle Evans'** final time on the podium. That was November 30, 1969, in Utica, New York.



Merle Evans' last night with Ringling - 11/30/1969

Photo by Zack Bloom

Each summer, Gordie would follow any circus that came down the road. He always drove and has never flown in an airplane. He got to know the circus community and they knew and trusted him, sometimes having him work as a concessioner selling programs and souvenirs. To this day, many circus folk still remember him -- Bello Noch, Timothy Tegge, and Nellie Hanneford being current examples.

Meanwhile, while touring with circuses during his vacations, Gordie would find opportunities to record the circus performances. He began by hooking a 10" reel-type tape recorder into the novelty shop next to the Big Top's power source, making sure there was no noise from the audience. He later switched to battery-powered cassette recorders. He also did 8 mm movie and VHS video recordings. Eventually, he decided he "had enough" and stopped recording, but at that point his collection was quite significant.

The Gordon Turner Audio Collection was given to the Ringling Museum in Sarasota, FL. They are currently writing a Center for Library and Information Resources grant to fund having this collection digitized and they have requested assistance from Windjammers Unlimited in developing that grant document. Eric Beheim (WJU #66) has offered his help in doing the conversions, as he has done with other circus band audios held by himself, by WJU, and by The Ringling. In all of these cases, we have the opportunity to add the digitized audio files to our website as well. If you haven't already, please sign onto our mywju.org website and check out the many titles already posted.

Gordie was born April 19, 1935 and is a graduate of Roessleville High School in Albany, NY. He was hooked on the circus early in life. In 1941, his parents drove him to the circus grounds in Albany, NY, arriving just as the circus train was pulling in. Something went awry and a cage door jolted open 50 feet from them and a lion jumped out. Then another. The crew quickly got the Turner family into a circus wagon for protection. The July 28, 1941 **Life Magazine** had

a feature article on the circus, mentioning that "escapade" of lions Porthos and Artiste along with other circus "mishaps."

An artist (illustrator) at heart, Gordie loved drawing circus pictures at an early age. Then he started building circus models and while in high school his large circus model was displayed on stage.



Gordie never married, but he did have a female "best friend forever" (BFF.) They met when he was 19 and she was 16 with the circus as a bareback rider. Of course, he had his GE career and she, Evy K. Karoly, had her life with the circus. But they continued to keep in close touch over the years.

Gordie was traveling with the Ringling show on July 1, 1956 when a major blowdown happened in Geneva, NY. First the marquee tent went down, and then the horse tent went up, freeing all the horses. The big top tent went up and down three times and then split, falling on the patrons. Gordie had a knife to cut the canvas as part of the rescue team. His "souvenirs" from that event are on display on the 2nd floor of the Tibbals Learning Center at The John & Mabel Art Museum in Sarasota, FL. Included is a scrap of canvas, a rope, and a stake top. Here is Gordon in front of that display.



After the blowdown, Ringling reopened with the prior year's tent but that was short-lived, with Ringling exiting under-canvas performances on July 16, 1956 at Heidelberg Race Track just outside Pittsburgh, PA. Gordie was not there for that performance as he had returned to his job at GE just two days prior.

We are thankful for Gordie's legacy. What a treasure!

THE GREATEST SHOWMAN Musical Adaptation

On March 5, 2025, Disney Theatrical Group announced the world premier of the musical adaptation of **The Greatest Showman**, the 2017 movie about the life of P.T. Barnum and his innovative creation of the Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Initial performances are scheduled for Spring 2026 at the ATG Entertainment’s Bristol Hippodrome Theater in Bristol, England. NYC Broadway dates are expected thereafter.

The musical will include the film’s hit songs from composers Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, including “The Greatest Show,” “Never Enough,” “This is Me,” “From Now On,” “Rewrite the Stars,” and “A Million Dreams.”

The movie’s soundtrack won best soundtrack at the 61st Grammy Awards, and “This Is Me” was nominated for Best Original Song at the 90th Academy Awards, and won the Golden Globe in the same category.

No casting has yet been announced for the new musical, but a nationwide search is underway across Great Britain and Ireland. Open auditions were held in March and April in numerous UK locations.

The **Greatest Showman** movie was an unexpected big hit, becoming one of the most popular movie musicals of

all time. It was produced by 20th Century Fox and opened in late December 2017 in competition with **Star Wars: The Last Jedi** and **Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle**. As a result, its initial box office results were weak, and also critics reviews were lackluster. However, the positive word-of-mouth testimonies from audiences resulted in it currently being one of the highest-grossing movie musicals of all time, making over \$460 million worldwide. Movie producer 20th Century Studios was acquired by Disney in 2019, and so it is Disney that is going forth with the stage production.



Hugh Jackman in “The Greatest Showman” movie
Moviestore/Shutterstock image

DONATIONS RECEIVED in Calendar 2024

Submitted by WJU Treasurer, Howard Habenicht, WJU #766

DONATIONS \$ 3,219 plus \$1,810 Net Meet Income = \$5,029

Category:

- J. J. Richards (\$15 to \$50)**
- Fred A. Jewell (\$51 to \$100)**
- Karl L. King (\$101 to \$250)**
- Merle Evans (Over \$250)**

Contributors:

- Henry Arkin, Paul D’Angelo, Richard Castle, Tad Dickerson, Janice Gibbs, J.D. Maguire, Frank Manola, Carol Marchant, Bruce McGarvey, Judy Steffen, Frank Vivio, Valery Welch, Bish Wolf
- Nancy Olson, Jeff Padden, Norris Siert, John Smyth, James J. Whalen, Pat Wheeler, Jackie LeClaire Memorial Fund, Kathy Nelson Memorial Fund, Venice Area Historical Society
- Jim Meek, Bob Knowler, Ronald Roberts, Alan Tavss, Robert Whetson
- Rod Everhart, Jimmie Moore, Lawrence Tate, Gilmour book sales, Doris & Victor Day Foundation

In addition to the above, Windjammers received a grant of \$9,175 from the Quad Cities Cultural Trust in connection with the July 2024 meet held in Moline, IL

OBITUARY

Michael Montgomery, WJU #962



Michael James Montgomery, 83, passed away on March 5, 2025. Loving husband of Nada (nee Srsen), dear father of Natalie Schmidt (Carl) and Steven Montgomery (Colleen); stepfather of Gretchen Obravac (Bob) and Heidi Yatchyshyn (Todd); grandfather of 8 and great-grandfather of 5.

Born on December 19, 1941, in Davenport, Iowa, Michael was the cherished son of the late Aaron Oscar Montgomery and Margaret Montgomery. He was preceded in death by his dear sister, Diane Gilman (Hobie). Mike spent much of his life in Illinois, Ohio, and Florida, with brief stints in Tennessee and Indiana.

Mike's life was a testament to his passions and dedication. He had a 41 year career at Navistar (International Harvester) getting in on the ground floor of the world of information technology. He completed a successful career running many IT departments at several plants and foundries. Prior to retirement, Mike was Manager-Major Divisional Computer Systems Projects for the Engine Group of Navistar International Corp.

Mike was an avid car buff often trading cars every few years. During his earlier years he partnered up on a race team and spent many Sundays at Union Grove Raceway in Wisconsin. He attended many NASCAR races as a spectator and even had an occasion to participate in the "Richard Petty Experience," driving a real race car at Chicagoland Speedway.

After his racing activities, Mike jumped back into his first passion, music. He was a proficient musician and could play the euphonium, tuba, trombone, and cornet. And he did so with great enthusiasm. He was a member of the Lakeland Civic Band and The Fine Arts Association Community Wind Ensemble in Cleveland, OH, the Naperville Municipal Band in Naperville, IL, and several other community bands in the Sarasota/Bradenton, FL area, where he spent many winter months.

He also was involved in the Association of Concert Bands as their Chief Information Officer for many years and was given the President's Award for significant contribution to the organization's success in 2001 and 2007.

Mike became a member of Windjammers Unlimited, Inc., a circus music historical organization in 1987. He served Windjammers as their Secretary for many years and also organized and hosted a dozen annual conventions. He was inducted into the Windjammers Hall of Fame in 2012 as a result of his many services to that organization.

A Celebration of Life will be held at a future date. Memorial contributions may be made to the Lakeland Civic Band Fund or The Fine Arts Association Community Wind Ensemble, at Lakeland Community College, 7700 Clocktower Dr, Kirtland, OH 44094-5198.

CINDERELLA FLOAT (BACK COVER)

Between 1886 and 1888, the Barnum & London Circus commissioned the creation of a series of floats commemorating various children's stories, such as Cinderella, Bluebeard, Sinbad the Sailor, Mother Goose, and Red Riding Hood. The show's name was changed to Barnum & Bailey Circus and the Cinderella float was one of those taken on their five-year tour of Europe (1897 to 1902).

The Cinderella float was used in parades off and on through 1918 and then stored in Bridgeport, CT after the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circuses were combined.

It was acquired by the Robbins Brothers Circus in 1927, along with the Two Hemisphere's bandwagon, the Barnum & Bailey Calliope, and other wagons and floats.

In 1935, Jess Adkins, one of the owners of the Cole Brothers Circus, bought the float and used it for the Cole Show. After a disastrous season in 1938, Cole sold the Cinderella float to the Terrell Jacobs Circus. From there, it ended up in a field near St. Louis. Guy Mulen salvaged the then-rotting relic and eventually gave it to Circus World Museum, where it was fully restored.



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Cinderella float amid circus wagons at Circus World Museum
*Photo courtesy of Circus World Museum,
Wisconsin Historical Society*

UPCOMING EVENTS

**July 15 - 20, 2025 Gainesville, GA; January 6 - 11, 2026 Venice, FL;
June 23 - 28, 2026 Columbia, MO**