

TRIBUTE TO TED DEPPISH - Circus Music Enthusiast

By Don Covington, WJU #119

I came to know Ted Deppish through the Circus Fans Association of America (CFA). He was a very active Circus Fan from the Canton, Ohio area. We met at a CFA convention and, in conversation, he mentioned that he had worked as a recording engineer and had obtained permission from Merle Evans to record live performances of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus band. Naturally, I was intrigued and we continued to correspond off and on for years. He shared with me some of the letters that he had received from Merle. They corresponded every season when the show played Ohio.

Theodore Paul Deppish was born September 30, 1902 in Canton, OH, and he lived his entire life there. His career path was fairly straight-forward: Student, Tool Maker, Clerk, Driver for a bakery, and then Delivery & Salesman for Alfred Nickles Bakery. During World War II he served in the Army, having joined February 16, 1942. But it was his hobby as a "recording engineer" and circus memorabilia collector that is his legacy.

After Ted passed away at age 60 on June 11, 1963, portions of his extensive circus collections were obtained by another Ohio circus fan, a lawyer named Bob Ball, who was a member of CFA's Clyde Beatty Tent, located in Canton, OH where Deppish lived.

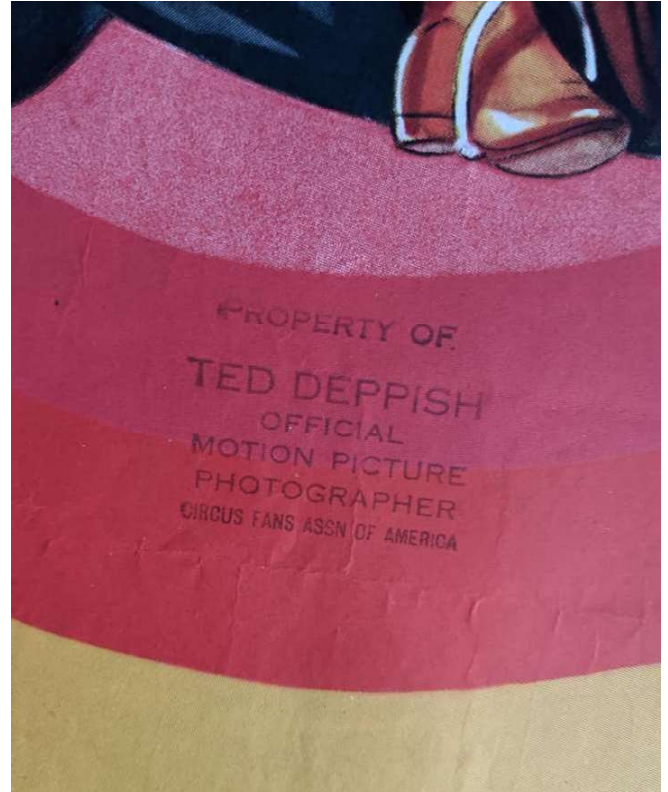
I was a "pen pal" with Bob Ball for many years. After Bob died, his family contacted me and said that Bob had instructed that his circus collection be sent to me. When I received it in 2009, it included boxes of Ted Deppish's wire recordings and reel-to-reel tapes.

Unfortunately, some of them were in very poor condition. Others, however, were salvageable. John Wetzel (WJU #949) and Eric Beheim (WJU #66) spent a lot of time transferring the audio to digital files. The wire recordings and tapes were especially a challenge, because over time they had stretched or disconnected causing distortion.

At the time of receiving the recordings, I asked noted circus historian Fred Pfening if he knew anything about Ted Deppish. Fred told me that Ted "mutilated" his circus posters with his name stamp, "PROPERTY OF TED DEPPISH". He did the same to photos and other circus memorabilia he acquired. At some point in the 1960s or 1970s, Fred's dad purchased a number of posters and other materials from Ted, all with the ownership stamp.

Fred further notes that Ted's name stamp continues his legacy to this day. As recently as the Circus Historical Society's auction conducted by Freedom Auction Company in Sarasota in 2019, there were rare lithographs and photos with Ted's identification stamp. Unfortunately, that stamp

on the face of these items greatly reduced their value to collectors. And poster collectors such as Timothy Tegge (WJU #2937) and Chris Berry (WJU #3959) have harsh comments relative to Ted's penchant for defacing what would otherwise be valuable circus memorabilia. **DON'T DO THIS!**



Fortunately, Ted did not find a way to embed his ownership stamp into the wonderful audio files he recorded and we are now preserving and protecting.

I think that the 1944 and 1945 Fitch recordings were made by Ted in a radio studio directly from a live broadcast. They may well be the only existing recordings of these historic performances by the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey band.

After Eric and John salvaged as much as they could, I packaged up the original materials and sent them to Circus World Museum's Parkinson Library in Baraboo. Peter Shrake, the archivist at Circus World, tells me that the recordings are scheduled to be reviewed and converted to digital format, but they are low on the priority list and it could be years before that happens.

It is now 58 years since Ted Deppish's death, but we give him a salute for the historic recordings he wanted preserved. Now, WJU has its own copies, thanks to John and Eric, and they are accessible by members on our MYWJU.ORG website. I urge our members to go listen to these and other wonderful examples of circus music at its best.