

P.T. Barnum Museum evokes memories of big top'

United Press International
 BRIDGEPORT, Conn. — P.T. Barnum's brick and brownstone treasure has an elephant in the lobby and a mummy in the attic.

The Barnum Museum, billed as the architectural wonder of the Victorian age, still turns heads in downtown Bridgeport with its bizarre domes and towers built to show off the likes of tiny General Tom Thumb and the Bearded Lady.

Nothing less could hold the memory of the brash and boastful former city mayor whose "Greatest Show on Earth" spirit lives on in circus tents and arenas around the world.

"He didn't mind stretching the truth," said Robert Pelton, curator of the museum planned by the dying Barnum as a last gift to his beloved city. It opened in 1893, nearly two years after his death at the age of 80.

"He did engage in hoaxes, but the end was not to take people in but to advertise. Some Yale professor called him the Shakespeare of advertising. It became fun to be tricked or humbugged by P.T. Barnum," Pelton said.

Thomas Edison and the Wright

Brothers lectured in the Romanesque-style structure, which was heavily water damaged over the years and is currently undergoing a \$400,000 restoration with city and state funds.

A long lost "Indian" figure will be duplicated and returned to an exterior frieze, craftsmen are restoring the elaborate detail of terracotta work, and exhibits are being improved and expanded.

The museum, owned by the city, remains open and the public flocks to view the \$1 million collection of circus and other memorabilia collected over Barnum's remarkable lifetime.

Barnum never said there was "a sucker born every minute," Pelton claims, but he couldn't seem to resist one last joke on those willing to part with the price of admission.

His will ordered that his bust be mounted in the main hallway so the eyes are fixed on those climbing the stairs. The eyes seem to follow a visitor and almost twinkle if the light is right, said Pelton, a Barnum buff who grew up in the city steeped in circus legend.

Barnum made Bridgeport the winter home of his circus, and plowed his fields with an elephant — but only when the New York train was passing, crammed with potential customers, Pelton said.

The Barnum Museum features vintage posters, elaborate cages and wagons and an entire miniature five-ring circus complete with children's figures sneaking under the big top.

A huge canvas proclaims: "The Great Costello — King of them all! Who actually dances on tons of glass with the naked feet!"

There are tattooed ladies and an Egyptian mummy "proven" to date from 500 B.C. "It's real," Pelton insisted.

The star of the show remains General Tom Thumb, born Charles Stratton in England.

The midget met Barnum in 1844 and went on to marry Mercy Livinia Warren Bump, "Miss Livinia," and win world-wide fame. Wax figures of the couple on their wedding day have a place of honor in the museum. Tom Thumb died at the age of 45.

A picture of Jumbo, the giant el-

ephant killed in 1885 by a speeding freight train in Ontario, Canada, also is displayed.

Jumbo's skin went to Tufts University in Medford, Mass., and his skeleton to a New York City museum. The Barnum Museum makes do with "Little Bridgeport," touted as the second elephant born in captivity and kept stuffed in the lobby.

Phineas Taylor Barnum was born in Bethel but lived most of his life in Bridgeport, where he developed housing and industry and lived in a succession of four mansions, including "Iranistan," patterned after a residence of King George IV.

He served as a state lawmaker and lost a race for Congress — oddly to another man named Barnum. P.T. Barnum also sought a U.S. Senate nomination and considered running for president on the Temperance Party ticket.

Barnum claimed he became a teetotaler after his wife invited a minister home to give him a lecture on spirits. Such was Barnum's zeal, Pelton said, that he often demanded tenants swear to forego drink when leasing their property.

Tour spotlights Wright brothers

United Press International
 DAYTON, Ohio — Jerry Sharkey was embarrassed. Pat Kennedy Lawford was inquiring about the Wright brothers' home and bicycle shop and he had nothing to show her.

Lawford, in Dayton several years ago on a campaign swing for her brother, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., appeared puzzled that the home of the Wright brothers lacked such landmarks. Sharkey explained both were moved to Greenfield Village, Mich., decades earlier as part of a big historical park.

The incident, however, prompted Sharkey to realize many of the city's existing aviation treasures were going unrecognized. At an economic development conference in 1980, he suggested creating a self-guided tour through the city that would allow automobiles to visit places connected to the birth of powered flight, and promote Dayton's aviation-connected sites.

Thus was born Aviation Trail,

a free-of-charge informational tour route that began winding through the city in 1981.

"Almost all the firsts of aviation are here," said Sharkey, a former history teacher and current superintendent of the Montgomery County Home for the Aged.

"Aside from the first flight elsewhere (in Kitty Hawk, N.C., in 1903), almost everything was done here. Dayton would be the only place that could possibly have something like this."

Sharkey believed the trail would encourage tourists visiting the city's better known aviation attractions, such as the U.S. Air Force Museum, to drive through the city and see Hawthorn Hill, the home Orville and Wilbur planned but only Orville occupied, following Wilbur's death; Carillon Park, which features the Wright Flyer III, a plane they designed and built; The Old Courthouse Museum, where an exhibit of Wright family memorabilia is housed, and other sites.

Critic not happy with food value

United Press International
 NEW YORK — As the tomato goes, so goes the peach and rutabaga unless Americans start to take more control over what they're buying and eating.

So goes the message of Fred Powledge, author of "Fat of the Land," a description and critique of the American food industry.

Powledge is not thrilled with the industry's search for "value-added" products that become more profitable as they become less similar to the original. Frozen foods that bill themselves as "100 percent fresh" are another bane, as are "fabrications" like Gourm-Egg, a 13-inch long frozen object known as a "hard-cooked egg roll product."

But the humble tomato, Powledge said, "is currently the worst possible example of what happens if we take a commodity and turn it into a manufactured item."

The California tomato, he said, "is now perfect for shipping and harvesting. It was created at the public

expense with agricultural research money." Its only drawback, according to Powledge, is that it tastes "like a damp roll of paper towels."

Powledge has been making the talk show rounds recently, urging Americans to pay attention "to the fact the food business is business and if we don't like certain parts of it there are things we can do," he said.

Paying attention to labels is part of the strategy, Powledge said. To demonstrate, he picked up a jar of Junior Vegetable Turkey baby food.

"I know, because I've looked into the matter, that if it says 'vegetable turkey' that means more vegetables than turkey," he said. The chief ingredient on the contents label, he pointed out, was water, followed by carrots, then turkey.

"Someone shopping for their kid ought to be able to read a label and know if they're getting mostly turkey, mostly vegetables or mostly water," he said.

Powledge urges shoppers to "abandon faith in all selling words such as 'natural,' 'improved,' 'new,' and 'fresh,'" and to regard terms like "flavored" and "food" as danger signs "as in 'orange-flavored drink' and 'cheese food.'"

Powledge urges consumers to buy more locally-grown produce, and accept the dictates of nature rather than those of the food business.

"Consumers need to pay more attention to the seasonal nature of food," he said. "We've gotten into the habit of assuming we can eat peaches in February. We can if we're willing to pay the price for transportation and what I think is decreased quality."

One of the things the nation "almost learned" in the last energy crisis, he said, is that "we're eating food at one end of country and growing it on the other. Most of the food is sold in the eastern part of the country,

but grown in the West."

The distribution system is expensive, Powledge said, costing \$3,000-4,000 to ship a truckload of produce from California to Boston. It is also becoming all-inclusive. The consumer may understand why grapes must be shipped from California in February, he said, "but what about grapes in August? Why do the horrid-tasting fruits still have to taste that way, come all that distance, during the local growing season as well?"

The future of the food industry, he said, may be one of "increased concentration," with less competition or diversity offered in every step of the process — from the farms doing the growing to the stores doing the selling.

Right now consumers who live in cities like Washington D.C. and Atlanta are at a disadvantage, he said, because a few very large supermarket chains dominate retail food sales.

Specialist: VDTs won't hurt unborn

United Press International
 WASHINGTON — Pregnant women need not fear that working at video display terminals will harm their babies, nor do they need to wear lead aprons for protection against radiation, an occupational medicine specialist says.

Dr. Marcus B. Bond, former president of the American Academy of Occupational Medicine, said data from studies of VDTs have shown radiation emitted by the television-like computer terminals is well below the level that would cause reproductive hazards.

"The only thing I know of coming out of it (a VDT) would be these very minute amounts of radiation," he said in a telephone interview. "To put this in perspective, I would say they're in the same general strength as the kinds of radiation in the room

you're in or I'm in where there are lights on."

"As far as X-rays and ultraviolet radiation, they have been measured so low as to be of no harmful level," he said. "I certainly feel there is no need for anything like lead aprons."

Bond recently testified in Congress that the rate of spontaneous abortions for all pregnancies is 10 to 20 percent. Birth defects occur among 2 percent of infants.

Because there is such a large number of VDT operators — 7 to 10 million — it is to be expected that dangers of miscarriages and birth defects would occur randomly, he said.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and the U.S. Army Environmental Hygiene Agency found an association between VDT use and birth defects or miscarriages.

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