



2008

## History: The Birth of "America" in 1882

Robert H.I. Dale

Butler University, [rdale@butler.edu](mailto:rdale@butler.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch\\_papers](https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers)



Part of the [American Popular Culture Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), [United States History Commons](#), and the [Zoology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dale RHI. (2008). History: The Birth of "America" in 1882. *Journal of the Elephant Managers Association*. 19(1), 26-29. Available from: [http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch\\_papers/374](http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/374)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact [digitalscholarship@butler.edu](mailto:digitalscholarship@butler.edu).

## HISTORY:

### The Birth of “America,” in 1882

By Robert H.I. Dale

*Department of Psychology, Butler University, 4600 Sunset Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46208*

This article concerns a New York Times story about the birth of the female Asian elephant calf, named America, at the winter headquarters of the “Greatest Show on Earth” in Bridgeport, Connecticut on February 2, 1882. Phineas. T. Barnum, one of the owners of the show, and one prone to self-aggrandizing bluster, claimed that America was the second elephant ever born in captivity. America was born only two months before the arrival in New York of the most famous circus elephant of all time, Jumbo, on Easter Sunday, 1882, and only two years before the origin of a small wagon circus run by the five Ringling (originally, Rüngeling) brothers from Baraboo, Wisconsin.

According to Richard Reynolds, a Trustee of the Circus Historical Society, writing on William “Buckles” Woodcock’s web-log ([bucklesw.blogspot.com](http://bucklesw.blogspot.com)), America was not even the second elephant born in captivity in North America. Reynolds claims that the first elephant calf born in the United States was delivered on Monday, May 31, 1875 at St. Joseph, Michigan, during a tour of the Howe’s Great London show (owned, mainly, by James E. Kelley). The calf was named Joe and lived only a few days, although Mr. Reynolds did not specify the sex of the calf. Apparently, Joe was conceived, as well as born, in the United States because the calf’s dam was part of a herd imported from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1871.

Howe’s Great London Show was absorbed by Cooper & Bailey’s International Ten Allied Shows in 1879, so that the same elephant herd was the source of a female calf, Columbia (also called Little Columbia), born on March 10, 1880 in the “Great London Circus, Sanger’s Royal British Menagerie” owned by James A. Bailey, James E. Cooper, and James L. Hutchinson (Circus in America Timeline), and of the calf, America, described in the New York Times article reprinted below, “BARNUM’S BABY ELEPHANT.”

In 1881, the Great London show and Barnum’s Museum, Menagerie and Circus had merged, becoming “P. T. Barnum’s Greatest Show on Earth, Sanger’s Royal British Menagerie, The Great London Circus & Grand International Allied Shows.” (Circus in America Timeline). A few years later, in 1887, P. T. Barnum and J. A. Bailey combined their troupes to form a single, very large circus that toured in 1888: the Barnum & Bailey circus. By 1902, the Ringling Brothers Circus had become a major rival of the Barnum and Bailey circus (Circus in America Timeline). James A. Bailey was now managing the latter circus, P. T. Barnum having died on April 7, 1891 (Circus in America Timeline). James Bailey died in 1905, and in 1907 the Ringling Brothers Circus purchased the Barnum and Bailey Circus, although the two circuses traveled separately until 1919 (Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus). During this period, roughly 1870-1920, very few elephant births were described. More recently, however, numerous (that is, more than 20) elephants have been born at the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Center for Elephant Conservation® (CEC) founded in 1995 and sponsored by Feld Entertainment (Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus).

This article about America's birth, reprinted below, differs dramatically from modern newspaper articles in writing style, punctuation and emotional tone. In addition, the article's content is unusual for several reasons. Firstly, it describes the birth-weights of two female Asian elephant calves at a time when such data were rarely published. Secondly, the behaviors of the newborn calf and of the adult elephants are described in some detail. Thirdly, the article describes some management practices (e.g., feeding the second calf crackers soaked in Jamaican rum), faulty beliefs ("the swaying motion common to all elephants"), and an extreme anthropomorphism that would be unacceptable now ("she [the dam, Queen] seemed to smack her lips and say "Bless you, my boy.>"). Fourthly, the article lists the membership of Barnum's elephant herd as it was in February, 1882. Finally, the article introduces us to some important employees of the Circus, such as Col. George Arstingstall (Saxon, 1989, p. 402), the highly experienced trainer who managed "Jumbo" between 1882-1885 after that elephant was brought to New York from England by William "Elephant Bill" Newman, Mr. Arstingstall's assistant (Jumbo landed in safety). Incidentally, this "Elephant Bill" is not the man described in the book *Elephant Bill* by Lt.-Col. J. H. Williams, 1950, Garden City, NY: Doubleday).

#### REFERENCES

- Barnum's baby elephant: great rejoicings over its birth at Bridgeport.* The New York Times, Feb. 4, 1882, p. 8. Retrieved on January 31, 2008 from: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9D00EEDF1E3CEE3ABC4C53DFB4668389699FDE>
- Cooper, James, E. Retrieved on February 1, 2008 from: <http://www.circushistory.org/Olympians/OlympiansC2.htm>
- Jumbo landed in safety.* The New York Times, April 10, 1882, p. 4. Retrieved on January 31, 2000 from: <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9A0CE4D61331E03ABC4852DFB2668389699FDE>
- Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Retrieved on January 31, 2008 from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ringling\\_Brothers\\_and\\_Barnum\\_and\\_Bailey\\_Circus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ringling_Brothers_and_Barnum_and_Bailey_Circus)
- Saxon, A. H. (1989). *P. T. Barnum: The legend and the man.* New York: Columbia University Press.

#### BARNUM'S BABY ELEPHANT GREAT REJOICINGS OVER ITS BIRTH AT BRIDGEPORT.

THE SECOND OF ITS CLASS BORN IN AMERICA—SCENES IN THE ELEPHANT DEPARTMENT OF THE SHOW—MR. BARNUM INSURES THE YOUNGSTER FOR \$300,000.

BRIDGEPORT, Feb. 3.—There was great joy here today over the fact that last evening this pleasant city became the birthplace of the second elephant ever born in captivity. The proud owner of the animal was sought by the masses, who desired to congratulate him upon the event, but the hero of many circus campaigns was not easily accessible. When Mr. Phineas T. Barnum is at home the American flag is always swung to the breeze from the roof of his splendid residence at Waldemere, but the flag was not flying to-day [sic]. He had taken up his head-quarters for the day in the elephant department of his show's Winter quarters just outside of this city, and was watching the movements of the baby elephant as though he had suddenly become the possessor of the greatest prize on earth. Only newspaper reporters, physicians, and scientific experts were permitted to disturb him, and the crowds that would have gladly embraced an opportunity to fondle the latest addition to his stock of elephants were kept at a distance. At 8 o'clock last evening 20 elephants of various sizes were chained by one of their hind legs to stout posts in a circle close to a sawdust ring. Eight minutes later Queen, who was chained to a heavy post in the centre of the ring was delivered of an heir, whose entrée into public life was greeted with a succession of roars from all the elephants in the building. Mr. Barnum was quickly summoned from his home. He shook the hands of all the attendants, and was as lively as the liveliest young man in Bridgeport, although nearly 71 years of age. Drs. Cole, Sandford, Porter, Bronson and Hubbard, of this city, soon arrived, and everybody, excepting the elephants was disposed to merry-making. The elephants seemed to take a gloomy view of the situation, and, while continuously swaying to and fro, winked in an ominous manner or flapped their blanket-like ears as though preparing to strike terror to the hearts of those of the human race who stood close to the outer circle of the ring. Chieftain, the father of the baby, was apparently more sullen than the rest, and manifested a desire to lean up against the wall in his corner and kick. He shrieked like a calliope [sic] when any one approached him, and it was deemed best to leave him to his meditations.

The baby lay in the hay and sawdust at the feet of its mother for several minutes, while the mother rubbed its body with her huge trunk. Queen was very nervous, the showman thought, and they did not bother her while she was thus engaged. She essayed to raise her new-born daughter to her feet, but the little one, to the astonishment of all, rose of her own accord and attempted to plant her block-like feet squarely on the sawdust. The mother closely eyed her offspring, and it was thought that either she or it, or both, would soon take a notion to lie on the hay which the attendants had freely scattered in the ring. The baby at first tottered, and then to the delight of the lookers-on began for the first time in its life the swaying motion peculiar to all elephants. Mr. George Arstingstall, the trainer, who has had an experience of over 20 years with elephants, and who witnessed the birth of the first one ever born in captivity on March 10, 1880, in Philadelphia, rejoiced over his new charge, and Queen permitted no one but him to come close to her. He fed her loaves of bread, pans of oat-meal, and a solution of soda-crackers and Jamaica rum, and she seemed to smack her lips and say "Bless you, my boy." Mr. Barnum remained around the ring until midnight, and then reluctantly went to his home to take a nap. Mr. James A. Bailey, his business partner, was among the elephants with Mr. Arstingstall and his assistants throughout the night and up to noon to-day. Mr. Arstingstall and Mr. H. H. Cross, the artist and historian of the show, measured and weighed the baby shortly after her birth. She was 30 inches in height, 36 inches in width, and weighed 145 pounds. She was of bluish color at birth, but changed to a delicate mouse shade. Her trunk was 7½ inches in length, measured from the under lip, and the tail was so short that no attempt was made to measure it. The baby, as one of the spectators expressed it, was "all legs." She had two teeth. She waddled about in close proximity to her mother's heavy feet, and was apparently in danger of being tripped up and trampled upon, but her immense mother moved as cautiously as though stepping on glass, and reached the baby with her trunk whenever the little one rested against her hind legs. The baby's eyes were fiery red, her hair was dark and scant, and her toy trunk curled up as she crawled under her mother and partook of natural nourishment. She is about one-third smaller in size than Columbia was at the time of her birth. The latter weighed 236½ pounds, while America, the new-comer [sic], weighs 145 pounds. For fully 16 hours America remained on her feet, and then, after many awkward attempts at lying on the hay, settled down in what must have been a most uncomfortable position. She rested on her knees and placed her mouth squarely on the grass with her trunk curled upward. This position greatly amused the spectators, and the baby through sheer exhaustion toppled over on her side and closed her eyes in slumber. She did not remain long at rest, however, and was soon again on her feet making a circuit of her mother.

Queen, the mother, is a native of Ceylon, and was

imported in 1871 by Mr. Barnum. She weighs about 6,800 pounds, and is something over 6 feet in height. Chieftain, the father, has been in this country 15 years. He is 11 feet 4 inches in height. There are now 21 elephants in Mr. Arstingstall's care. The large ones are Pilot, who is 12 feet in height: Fritz, Gypsy, Albert, Pallas, Hebe, Mandarin, Prince, Juno, Queen, and Chieftain. The small ones are Romeo, Tippto Saib, Nan, Lena, Venus, Adonis, Nemo, Topsy, Columbia, and the baby which was yesterday christened America. When the elephants were led toward the water-tank early this morning they declined, for some reason known only to themselves, to drink. They halted whenever they were apparently satisfied that they might get a good view of the new-comer among them. Mandarin and Hebe, the mother and father of little Columbia, took especial interest in the little one, and stared long and intently at her. Mandarin coolly stepped into the ring, and moved in a mysterious manner around the baby. The keeper at once undertook to persuade him to return to his post, and he at once rebelled. Then they returned him to his chains. Columbia was most anxious to get into the ring and frolic with the daughter of Queen and Chieftain, but Mr. Arstingstall prevented her from gratifying her wish. For a long time he kept little Columbia chained close to Queen, and the latter was much interested in Hebe's daughter. They rubbed against each other in an affectionate manner, and were like an old cat and her favorite kitten. When Mr. Arstingstall one day removed Columbia from this close companionship with Queen, and put another small elephant, Gypsy, in her place, Queen manifested her displeasure by inflicting summary chastisement upon Gypsy. Then Mr. Arstingstall rescued Gypsy and returned the rollicking little Columbia to her position alongside Queen. While Mr. Barnum surveyed his array of elephants to-day, the trainer unchained Columbia and asked her to stand up "like a lady." The little one stood on her hind legs. Then she was invited to stand on her head, and she was about to do so, but was so near the edge of the platform on which she stood that Mr. Barnum cried out, "Take care, you little rascal, or you'll fall over and hurt yourself." Then Columbia resumed her natural position and unwillingly returned to her chain. The large elephant Prince, who, the trainer said, was nothing but "a great, big school-boy," proposed to remove his chain and dance about the ring. The thick skin on his forehead had been badly scraped as though he had been bounding against a stone wall, and when Mr. Arstingstall's attention was called to this he said: "I use him sometimes with others when I want to switch off some of the railroad cars on our tracks, and he has scraped his forehead while at work. He is always in for fun, and will quit work at any time to play with anybody." Mr. Arstingstall had no faith in the friendship of these animals, saying that he always mistrusts them and makes it a rule to govern them in the most serious possible manner. He dislikes to have persons "fool" with them, and will not permit such conduct.

Mr. Barnum yesterday secured an insurance of \$300,000 on the baby America for one year. None of the insurance companies would take the risk, but rich stockholders in New York and in Hartford accepted it. He paid \$52,000 premium, or \$1,000 a week for 52 weeks. It is his intention to exhibit the baby with her father and mother, as 'the "elephant family,"' and he says that the attraction will be so extraordinary that he can well afford to pay that enormous sum of money for an insurance on her life. Milk from Queen was sent to Prof. E. H. Jenkins, of New Haven, and to Prof. Charles Doremus, of New York, for analysis. Mr. Arstingstall said that after the birth of Columbia he and some of his associates drank milk from Hebe and greatly relished it. In the opinion of all who saw the baby America yesterday it was perfectly healthy, and bids fair to enjoy a long and honorable public life. Col. W. W. Durand and Richard F. Hamilton, known familiarly as "Tody" Hamilton, both attachés to the truth-telling staff of Mr. Barnum's show, have been here all day entertaining the large number of newspaper men in attendance from New-York [sic], Boston, Hartford, New-Haven [sic], and other cities. Mr. Barnum presented Mr. Arstingstall, the trainer, with a handsome scarf-pin formed into a golden elephant with a large diamond in its trunk.

*The New York Times*

Published: February 4, 1882

Copyright © The New York Times.



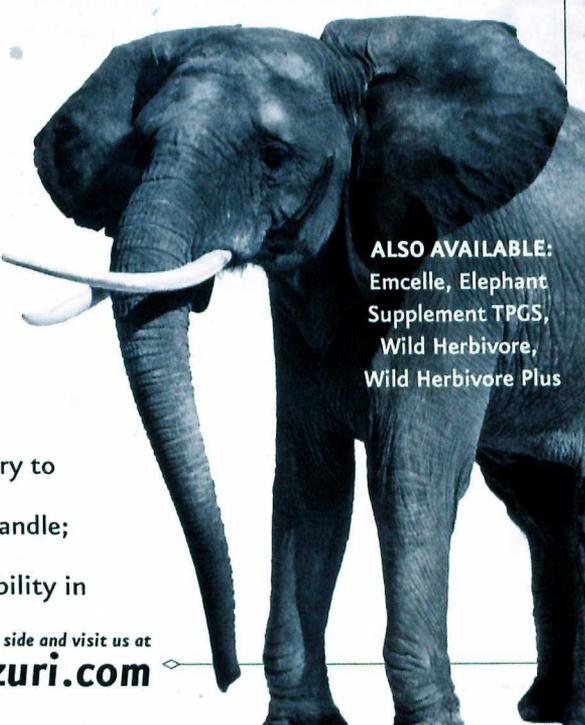
# Mazuri<sup>®</sup>

The Exotic Animal Feeding Resource

## FLEXIBLE AND EASY TO FEED SUPPLEMENT

**MAZURI<sup>®</sup> ELEPHANT SUPPLEMENT 5666:**

- Contains soybean oil - Provides essential fatty acids to meet nutritional requirements.
- Provides proper ratios of vitamins - Animals stay in good condition; eliminates the need for more expensive means of supplementation.
- Added levels of essential minerals - Not necessary to supplement with other minerals.
- Pellet form - Easy to feed; easy for animals to handle; minimizes waste.
- Choice of vitamin E forms - Allows greater flexibility in feeding program.



**ALSO AVAILABLE:**  
Emcelle, Elephant Supplement TPGS,  
Wild Herbivore,  
Wild Herbivore Plus

Take a walk on the wild side and visit us at  
**[www.Mazuri.com](http://www.Mazuri.com)**