

# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE RED RIVER VALLEY RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Web Site: [WWW.RRVVHS.ORG](http://WWW.RRVVHS.ORG)

On Facebook: [Shreveport Railroad Museum](https://www.facebook.com/ShreveportRailroadMuseum)

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*February, 2017*

SHREVEPORT, LA

*Our 36<sup>th</sup> Year*

## Circus Trains Come to an End



The photos above show Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus elephants being unloaded at the Texas & Pacific Passenger Station in 1958. There are at least 2 reasons you will never see this again:

1. The circus does not have elephants anymore
2. The circus is shutting down

After 146 years, the curtain is coming down on "The Greatest Show on Earth." The owner of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus told The Associated Press on January 14 that the show will close forever in May. Declining attendance combined with high operating costs, along with changing public tastes and prolonged battles with animal rights groups all contributed to its demise." There isn't any one thing," said Kenneth Feld, chairman and CEO of Feld Entertainment. "This has been a very difficult decision for me and for the entire family." The circus traveled around America by train.

"The competitor in many ways is time," said Feld, adding that transporting the show by rail and other circus quirks - such as providing a traveling school for performers' children - are throwbacks to another era. "It's a different model that we can't see how it works in today's world to justify and maintain an affordable ticket price. So you've got all these things working against it." The Feld family bought the Ringling circus in 1967. The show is 2 hours and 7 minutes long, with the longest segment - a tiger act - clocking in at 12 minutes. "Try getting a 3- or 4-year-old today to sit for 12 minutes," he said.

Feld and his daughter Juliette Feld, who is the company's chief operating officer, acknowledged another reality that led to the closing, and it was the one thing that initially drew millions to the show: the animals. Ringling has been targeted by activists who say forcing animals to perform is cruel and unnecessary. In May 2016, after a long and costly legal battle, the company removed the elephants from the shows and sent them to live on a conservation farm in Central Florida. Attendance has been dropping for 10 years, said Juliette Feld, but when the elephants left, there was a "dramatic drop" in ticket sales. Paradoxically, while many said they didn't want big animals to perform in circuses, many others refused to attend a circus without them. "We know now that one of the major reasons people came to Ringling Bros. was getting to see elephants," she said. The Felds say their existing animals - lions, tigers, camels, donkeys, alpacas, kangaroos and llamas - will go to suitable homes. Juliette Feld says the company will continue operating the Center for Elephant Conservation.

In recent years, Ringling Bros. tried to remain relevant, hiring its first African-American ringmaster, then its first female ringmaster, and also launching an interactive app. It added elements from its other popular shows such as motorbike daredevils and ice skaters. But it seemingly was no match for Pokemon Go and a generation of kids who desire familiar brands and YouTube celebrities. "We tried all these different things to see what would work, and supported it with a lot of funding as well, and we weren't successful in finding the solution," said Kenneth Feld.

The only other circus with shows scheduled this year is the 80-year old Carson & Barnes Circus, with shows scheduled thru February in various small towns in Texas. According to their website, they still have "elephants, horses, ponies, dogs and humans performing amazing tricks in the center ring".

### **Upcoming Events**

February 17 – RRVRHS Meeting – 7 p.m. - Shreveport Water Works Museum –  
142 N. Common St. - Call (318) 458-3123 for information.

March 3 - First Friday Railroad Photography Meeting – 7:30 p.m. at the Shreveport Water Works Museum  
142 N. Common St. – Call (318) 458-3123 for information.

### **The President's Message**

Hello Railfans!

Since our last newsletter, several things have happened. First, we found out that we will have to build a concrete walk from the waterworks museum down to our proposed museum site on N. Common St. if we plan to use the waterworks restrooms and parking lot. The problem with this is the MPC wants to include all buildings at the waterworks museum to determine the required number of parking spaces, which would be more than they have now. If we don't use their parking and restrooms, we will have to build our own. This will increase the cost significantly. We are looking into the problem.

Second, the engineer at Mohr & Associates is working on the plans to submit to the MPC.

Third, I met with David Pattridge, the dirt and foundation man, and he promised he would get us a quote for removing the dirt at our proposed site.

Also, we received a letter from the Union Pacific Foundation informing us that we will receive another \$10,000 grant in May of this year. This will help a great deal, and we are very grateful for their support.

Well, that's about all I know at this time so I'll close for now and hope to see all of you at our next meeting. Happy Railroading!

Russell

### **It's Time to Pay Your 2017 Dues !**

Please send a check or money order for \$20.00 with this membership form to Bill Hasheider at  
6813 Despot Road, Shreveport, LA 71108

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

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Red River Valley Railroad Historical Society  
3012 Nottingham Drive  
Shreveport, LA 71115

**Next Meeting**  
**February 17**