

When Florida was battered by a hurricane in 1926, the boom collapsed at the same time that Fisher was sinking millions into a resort project at Montauk on the eastern end of Long Island. The Great Depression finished off Fisher's entrepreneurial dreams, and he died in 1939 with few remaining assets.

Mark S. Foster has written a compelling biography that captures Carl Fisher's amazing spirit and drive. He has mined the Fisher papers housed at the Historical Museum of South Florida in Miami, and he has exploited other relevant source material. Fisher was no Rockefeller, Edison, or Ford; he created no great corporations, and he carried out most of his expansive projects with only a few associates. In the age of giant corporations and huge bureaucracies, he worked mostly alone. Fisher's extraordinary talent was to dream up and then promote popular new applications for technology. He was the salesman *extraordinaire*. Selling the Florida dream to chilled northerners in the midst of winter tapped into Fisher's flair for promotional extravaganzas. Except for a laudatory and unreliable biography written by his wife, Jane Fisher (*Fabulous Hoosier*, 1947), little had been written about Fisher. Fortunately, Foster has recovered the fascinating history of this creative businessman whose accomplishments have persisted while his memory has dimmed.

RAYMOND A. MOHL is professor of history at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. A specialist in U.S. urban history, his most recent book is *The New African American Urban History* (1996). He is currently completing a history of race relations in Miami, Florida.

Life in a Three-Ring Circus: Posters and Interviews. Essays by Sharon L. Smith and Stephen J. Fletcher. ([Indianapolis]: Indiana Historical Society, 2001. Pp. 79. Illustrations. \$39.95.)

"When the circus came to town, they paraded right down Main Street . . . Businesses closed, all the schools closed, everybody went to the circus . . . [T]hey had bands, they had wild animals, they had horses, they had pretty ladies, all coming down Main Street. It was just magical" (p. 68).

And magical it was, as vividly described and illustrated in *Life in a Three-Ring Circus*. This is a gloriously colorful volume that has both fascinating facts and beautifully reproduced posters from the golden age of the circus. Whether or not one has ever attended a circus, it is a book that everyone can enjoy. Especially interesting are the accounts of circuses in the state of Indiana, specifically the town of Peru, which so many companies used for their winter quarters and which perpetuates the charm of the circus to this day.

The book opens with a brief and lively history of the circus from Rome's Circus Maximus to today's so-called Shrine Circuses. There are many familiar names in this section, which outlines the careers

of movers and shakers like P. T. Barnum, James Bailey, Clyde Beatty, and John Ringling. Other names important to the development of the circus are not so familiar. For example, one learns about William Cameron Coup, a native of Terre Haute, Indiana, who contributed significantly to circus travel by inventing a process of loading trains with circus equipment that greatly streamlined the movement of the circus from place to place. He also perfected the technique of plastering the countryside with gaudy posters to whet the appetites of prospective customers.

Some of these posters are wonderfully reproduced here, and they alone are worth the price of the book. A glowering hippo (p. 8), a striking clown (p. 55), and a supremely confident Frank Buck amidst a jungle menagerie (p. 44) are among the most exciting examples. Unfortunately no mention is made of the approximate dates of these posters. An excellent photo of downtown Greensburg, Indiana, (p. 17) gives us an idea of how these posters were used. It is obvious that the advance advertising was overwhelming in those more innocent times. When the photograph of Greensburg was taken in August 1907 there was no radio or television, and movies were just beginning to catch on. The circus was the big event in entertainment for small towns like Greensburg.

Sharon L. Smith and Stephen J. Fletcher relate stories and interviews that are of great interest. For example, this reader was quite taken with the story of Lilian Leitzel, who appeared in South Bend in 1914; her act consisted of "a never-before-seen stunt, the one-armed flange, for which she separated her shoulder joint again and again, throwing her entire body vertically over her shoulder." According to Smith, Leitzel commanded top billing longer than any other circus performer in history.

Gilbert Taylor, presently curator of the Crispus Attucks Museum in Indianapolis, was interviewed about his father, Hugh Taylor, who was a trombonist with the Hagenback-Wallace Circus in the 1920s. Taylor tells what the life of an African American traveling with the circus was like. He recalled that his father reported that black performers were not treated differently in the circus, but with townspeople it was a different story.

The book closes with an episode concerning the antics of a female elephant named Modoc that bolted during a performance at the Wabash (Indiana) High School gymnasium in 1942. Modoc caused considerable consternation around the countryside for about four days before she was effectively corralled.

This is a valuable and entertaining book.

CONRAD C. LANE is emeritus professor of telecommunications at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana.