



## Looking back to 1949 WHEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO SUMNER

It's fun to read the Sumner newspapers, The last locally owned Sumner paper was published in June, 1990, however the Sumner Historical Society archives contain most of the papers from 1889 to 1990 on paper or on microfilm.

So, it's fun to read the Sumner newspapers. How else would we know that on July 26, 1949, the Seal Brothers Circus came to Sumner and set up for a one day stand in Griffen's pasture. An ad in the July 21, 1949 Sumner News Index promises a colossal event.

Griffen's pasture was an open field, a bulky triangle where Sunset Chevrolet is now. Locals remember horses pasturing where, today, horsepower reigns.

The owner of The Seal Bothers Circus was Fred (Bud) Anderson and this was not his first circus. In 1915 Bud started with a dog and pony show in Emporia, Kansas. He worked his way up to starting the Seal Brothers Circus during the depression, after a few years he sold it and started Anderson's Jungle Oddities Circus which he sold, and in 1948 formed a new Seal Brothers Circus.

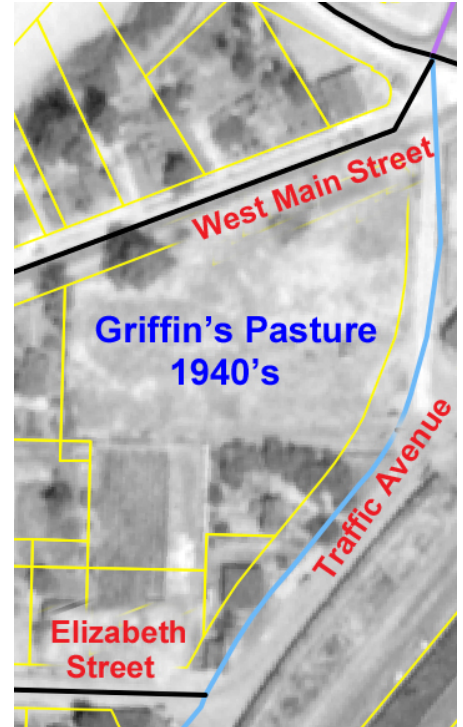
That circus started its' tour in March at Giddings, Texas and by July found it's way to Sumner. Other Washington State stops on

the way were Kennewick, Prosser, Sunnyside, Toppenish, Wapato and Goldendale. He liked small towns.

The ad in the newspaper trumpets 150 performers, 22 tents and 5000 seats but it was probably a stock ad used in every small town and what actually came to Sumner would have been a smaller show. In those days there were no regulations for Truth in Circus Advertising.

Let's look at the logistics, Griffen's Pasture would not hold all the ad ballyhooed and still have room for customers. Plus our small town (under 3000 at the time) would struggle to host such a large influx. We would run out of rhubarb pie!

Billboard Magazine in 1949 carried "help wanted" ads plus a roster for  
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photograph, courtesy City of Sumner







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Bud's circus tour. There were over 25 support people with jobs and titles like superintendent, canvas man, office wagon, equestrian director, ticket promotion, electrician, master of transportation, head waiter, brigade agent, band leader and country routes. Bud was also looking for a trombone player, cook, ticket sellers and dancing girls.

When you pay cash for ads you usually get free ink. The News Index ran an article telling folks to expect to see these performers. Wilhemina, the ponderous performing pachyderm, the Fuller family with acrobatic and tumbling feats, the Dekohl trio, jugglers. There would be trained dogs and monkeys plus a Liberty Horse Act, riderless steeds performing in tandem to the horse master's verbal instructions and crack of a whip.

There were many clowns. Billboard gave us their names, Happy Kelly, Fats Miller, Harry Harris, Slats Henderson, Wally McKinley and Randy Johnson.

Billboard listed the Concert Band (featuring Lenord Buck Jones) and the sideshow acts. The Hopkins Family Scotch Bagpipe Band; Marie Leter, ventriloquist; Cleo Bennett,

mentalistic; Dorothy Taft, sword box; Val Deene, tattoo artist; and Maye Jones, Hawaiian Village. Eddie and Frenchy Moore handled the inside concessions.

It had to be an exciting show for Sumner and it is probable that more than one young man in the bleachers daydreamed about running off to join the circus. Bud probably

needed help by then, the circus had been on the road for five months. Maybe the job of "candy floss man" was open. A cotton candy making machine cost \$235. in 1949, expensive, but a money maker and fun to operate.

After Sumner the circus traveled to other small towns in Washington, Idaho and Montana. It went on tour again in 1950. On June 14, 1950 Bud was killed when a semitrailer carrying horses overturned on a mountain highway in Montana. The next show, that same day, went on as scheduled in Forsythe. That gives meaning to the expression, the show must go on. Luke Anderson, Bud's son, took over the business and later renamed it the Wallace & Clark Circus. He went on touring the same routes as his father.

Let's revisit Griffen's pasture, where Sunset Chevrolet stands now. Could it be that part of Sunset's success is because it occupies the same piece of ground where people once flocked for showmanship and salesmanship? Did those vibes carry on into the present? If so, Bud Anderson would have been proud to add something to Sumner's success and Sumner's history.



Matt Laurish with the Bud Anderson Liberty Horses



Billboard 7-9-1949



Hawaiian Village, Doc Capell Show 1941

