

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

*The story of the man behind
The Greatest Showman*

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“THE NOBLEST ART IS THAT OF MAKING OTHERS HAPPY.”

- P.T. BARNUM

P.T. Barnum basically invented show business, as far as America is concerned. Sure, his name is widely associated with the circus, but he was incredibly influential because of his other genius accomplishments as well.

In the 19th century, Barnum exploded the assumptions of entertainment with his shows that appealed to the widest possible audience. A form of entertainment that had, before then, been reserved exclusively for the upper class. In doing so, he generated two new show business industries.

“First, he created the modern museum by reimagining it as an exuberant, multi-faceted entertainment experience with appeal to everyone,” said Matthew Solari, Creative Director of Project Development at BRC Imagination Arts. “Then, at an age when most people are contemplating retirement, Barnum reinvented the circus as a spectacular, must-see road show event.”

All of Barnum’s endeavors were wildly successful. On a personal level, he cared deeply for both his family and what was called his circus family. “He loved children and being with them,” said Elinor Biggs. “I hope that if a person remembers only one thing about P.T. Barnum, it is that he lived his life fulfilling the promise of his famous quote, “The noblest art is that of making others happy.” It makes me so proud to be his great, great, great granddaughter.”

One of Barnum’s most fruitful ventures, Barnum’s American Museum, located in New York City, offered a variety of attractions. In 1865, the museum caught fire in one of the worst fires the area had ever seen. In 1893, one of his Bridgeport, Connecticut-based buildings was established as the Barnum Institute of Science and History, which then became the famed Barnum Museum in 1968.

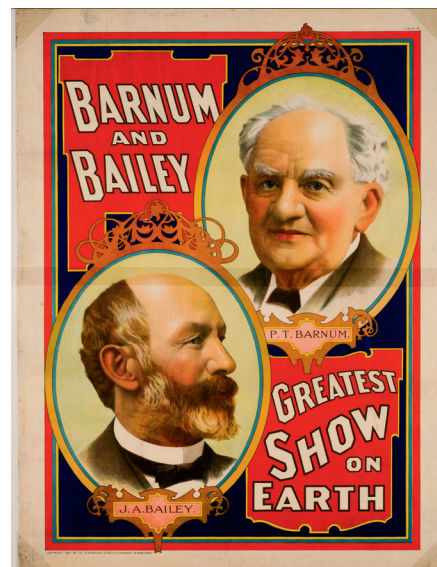
It seems natural disasters have plagued the Barnum name, when a 2010 tornado hit the Bridgeport area, destroying nearly everything. The next year, Hurricane Irene caused additional damage and worsened the condition of the already frail building, and the damage was augmented the following year by Super Storm Sandy. In the true spirit of

Barnum, however, this disaster is being embraced as an opportunity to restore, rebuild and reimagine. “The Barnum Museum has undertaken a massive restoration and re-envisioning effort to restore the Museum back to full operational capacity,” said Kathleen Mayer, art historian and executive director of the museum.

Since then, purveyors and museum staff have been relentless in their efforts to restore this icon of creativity and imagination. “We are currently developing plans to bring P.T. Barnum’s story to life in ways that will excite, entertain and inspire new generations of guests, while teaching about his impact on Connecticut and American history,” said Mayer.

Through this museum, the staff hopes to keep Barnum’s legacy alive. “The Barnum Museum will always be the home of Barnum’s legacy,” said Biggs. “When the renovations are complete, visitors will no longer just view the collection, but will be given an emotional, immersive, interactive and story-driven experience.”

Those behind the Barnum Museum are



unequivocally passionate about him. “Barnum was charismatic,” said Solari. “He was a visionary. His embrace of diversity; hiring people who were shunned by society, was very rare — and courageous — at the time.” Most importantly, he added, Barnum was driven by an unquenchable desire to delight people.

The Barnum Museum is the last surviving structure attributed to P.T. Barnum’s life and work, and contains thousands of artifacts relating to both him and 19th century America. As the museum continues to recover from disaster after disaster with the intention of serving generations to come, the group remains committed and eager to build on the renewed interest brought on by the movie, “The Greatest Showman.” It has rekindled America’s love affair with all things Barnum. *M*

