Highlights from

****

Somers Historical Society, founded in 1956, is an all-volunteer, 501(c)(3) educational corporation which holds an Absolute Charter from the New York Department of Education.  Its mission is to care and advocate for local historical resources and its world-class collections of early 19th century travelling menagerie and circus epherma, including the Dr. Hugh Grant Rowell Circus Collection, and local history, as well as to educate others about these resources and history.

Since the advent of early 19th century travelling menageries in America and the subsequent formation of the Zoological Institute in Somers, NY, *all* history in the town is inextricably related to the circus earning the town its designation as “Cradle of the American Circus.”

Over the past few years, the Society has been privileged to be a participant in circus-related exhibitions with other institutions, including Bard Graduate Design Center in New York City and the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, CT. Those objects which were included in those two exhibitions were merged upon returning to Somers to create an exhibition entitled “Homecoming 2013.”

Furthermore, the some of Society’s circus collection has been digitized and is visible online through the Society’s website, [www.somershistoricalsoc.org](http://www.somershistoricalsoc.org) as well as at [www.hrvh.org](http://www.hrvh.org) and [www.westchesterarchives.com](http://www.westchesterarchives.com). Audio interviews about Somers’ circus heritage, the Elephant Hotel, Old Bet and the Farmers and Drovers Bank, to name a few, are audible through Soundcloud, as well as through direct links on the Society’s website.

This fall, an exhibition entitled Inspirational Artifacts will open at Somers Historical Society in the Elephant Hotel in Somers, NY. The exhibition will feature poetry and the artifacts that served as inspiration from the book Cradle of the American Circus; Poems from Somers, NY. ([www.historypress.org](http://www.historypress.org)) and will be funded, in part, by History Press.

**This year, 2015** **marks the 180th anniversary of the formation of the Zoological Institute in the Elephant Hotel,** a capital stock company arguably the most significant development in the history of the early American circus. The Zoological Institute was formed with capitalization of more than $300,000 with more than 100 investors.   In today's monetary value that would equate to more than $8 million dollars. *The Elephant Hotel was given the designation of National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior in 2005, in large part because of the formation of the Institute in this building.*

A menagerie route book from 1838 from our collection was the foundation of an article entitled “The Names in the Ledger: Harlequins, Horses and Howdahs” written by the late Beverly Brigandi, a former Society volunteer and Somers resident. The article appeared in the winter issue The Westchester Historian, a scholarly quarterly published by the Westchester County Historical Society, NY.

Beverley also wrote an historical romance under her pseudonym Beverley Andi, entitled Kicking Sawdust.  The book is based on the same ledger and dedicated to Somers Historical Society, in part, because of our collections.   Kicking Sawdust is available as an electronic book AND as paperback at www.thewildrosepress.com . It will also be available by reservation at the Somers Historical Society Table at the Worldwide Circus Summit with portion of the proceeds benefitting the Dr. Hugh Grant Rowell Circus Collection at Somers Historical Society.

*The following is a recent conversation with Beverley about her experiences in transcribing "Route Book #18" which served as the basis for her work. \**

**What inspired you to transcribe the ledger?**

The pristine ledger written by William Delavan in crisp, legible, black ink held the names of 32 performers listing their salary and weekly expenses. I was intrigued. Who were they? How were they related to Somers?

**What inspired you then to write the paper?** Like many, I knew little about the early circus. The research led me to uncover the negative attitude society placed on the young American circus. It exposed the difficulties women entertainers fought. Lastly, it put a spotlight on the amazing careers and the long lives of many of the performers.

**What inspired you to write the novel?**How could I waste all that research? *Kicking Sawdust* is based on the real circus troupe who travelled by train along the eastern seaboard in the 1840’s. The names have been changed, though many of the characters in the story follow the outstanding careers of their real counterparts. It took a few years to begin putting flesh and bones on the names and deciding on a storyline. However, I did change the location from Boston to New York and the year from 1843 to1858.  I needed the invention of the telegraph and sewing machine as well as the building of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. My novel is a light romance thus my hero and heroine fall in love and, of course, live happily ever after in Westchester.

\* Sadly, Bev passed away in spring 2015 shortly after the publication of her book.

**Highlights in Coming Months**

* **Thursday, July 16, 10am at**

**Somers Historical Society Vendor Table**

**Meet Jo Pitkin, Author**

*Cradle of the American Circus; Poems from Somers, NY*

* **October 2015, American Archives Month**

Following events held in commemoration of the founding of the Zoological Institute in Somers, NY and featuring artifacts from our collections. Check www.somershistoricalsoc.org for exact dates.

**Inspirational Artifacts Exhibition Opening**

funded by the History Press and Somers Historical Society

**featuring objects from *Cradle of the American Circus; Poems from Somers, NY***

**Kicking Sawdust, local book launch in memory of Bev Brigandi**

 **Very Special People, presentation about side shows in America**

**by circus fan & Society friend Jon Fiorella of Carmel, NY**

* **May 2016**

**Community Celebration of**

**50th Anniversary of issuance of Circus Stamp First Day Cover**

*in conjunction with 60th Anniversary celebration of founding of Somers Historical Society*

Stop by our Vendor Table at the 2015 Worldwide Circus Summit



Visit us in Somers, NY at

Elephant Hotel, a National Historic Landmark

335 Rte. #202, Somers, NY 10589

ONLINE: [www.somershistoricalsoc.org](http://www.somershistoricalsoc.org)

Phone: (914) 277-4977

Email: somershistoricalsoc@yahoo.org