

BIG TOP CIRCUS BOASTS RETURN OF BIGGEST STARS

Billed as *The Biggest Stars on the Planet*, those prodigious performing pachyderms, Tina and Jewel, have returned to Center Ring in the 2006 production of The World's Largest Circus under the Big Top, Cole Bros. Circus of the Stars. Fans can meet Tina and Jewel when the circus raises its Big Top.

Since 1796, when Captain Jacob Crowinshield brought the first elephant to America from India, the largest of land mammals has inspired awe, sporadically stirred controversy, and even expanded the English language. People so admired a huge elephant seen in the 1880's, they adopted his moniker to describe unusually large items and events, thus adding his name, "Jumbo" to our vocabulary. In America, the elephant came to symbolize anticipation and adventure, and the expression "going to see the elephant" characterized the hopes and dreams of the voyagers heading west for California's gold rush.

Amazed, amused, and occasionally annoyed, folks flocked to see Crowinshield's mammoth and the elephants that followed. In 1816 America's second elephant, Old Bet met an unfortunate demise at the hands of animal exhibition critics who argued that her display violated the era's Blue Laws. Even today, traveling elephants have critics who lobby to effect laws to ban their exhibition; thankfully, their activism has not proved as mortal as that of their predecessors. The result of activist efforts can prove humorous, as in the example of the North Carolina law that prohibits use of elephants to pull a plow!

Elephants and men have worked together for at least 5,000 years, and 2,000 year-old Sanskrit texts document elephant training. But Americans did not see their first trained elephant until 1821, when newly arrived Little Bet embarked on a performing tour. She was followed by scores of performing elephant immigrants who came to capture the imagination of American families, and eventually become the much beloved icon of the three-ring circus.

In the 19th century, it cost a steep quarter of a dollar to view *elephas maximus* up close and personal. Two centuries later, Cole Bros. Circus offers elephant aficionados the opportunity to meet Tina and Jewel and learn more about these amazing animals for free at circus tent raising, which takes place between 7:00 a.m. and noon on opening day of the show.