

CARNIVALS and CIRCUSES

In the old days traveling groups of entertainers would make a circuit of towns large enough to warrant a one-day stand. They would send advance agents into a community to drum up interest for the group that would come later. Some of the larger groups would remain longer than a day. They added zest and excitement to lives of people before cars, radio and television - lives that were insulated greatly from the outside world.

No matter that most of the entertainment was second-rate or cheap - it was a change from the hum-drum existence of day-to-day life. As with all things, once the need disappears, the thing itself disappears; and so it was with these groups. In 1968, now, only two groups come into town - carnivals hired by the American Legion Post and St. Bridget's Church.

Our records are sparse - we have a few newspaper notes only of Maynard being visited - these groups did not advertise in the papers as is done today; it was word-of-mouth and hand-bills.

The first date is July 26, 1901 - 'The Saxonians Comedy Company entertainers and specialty stars will give a series of entertainments in Maynard all next week at their pavilion, corner of Glendale and Summer Street - admission 10 and 20 cents.'

The pavilion, of course, was a tent. The location was the present grounds of Anderson Ford used car lot on Acton Street.

June 6, 1913 - 'The Downey and Wheelers Circus will be in Marlboro, and the Selectmen in Maynard have granted a license to the Sautelle Circus, which will show Monday, June 30.'

May 14, 1915 - 'On Wednesday, D. F. Knowlton of Lowell set up a Merry-go-Round on a lot at corner of Glendale and Acton Streets.'

Before the large garage on River Street, situated practically on the corner of River and Main Streets was built, (presently housing the Middlesex

CARNIVALS and CIRCUSES

Laundry Self-Service) this lot was used in the latter 10's and early 20's by carnivals and circuses.

Also, the area at and about 98 Summer Street (James Ledgard's home) was built up, where Spark's Three-Ring Circus with elephants and other wild animals would come yearly in the 1920's.

The Legion Post for years now has been hiring a carnival around the Fourth of July to appear at the Rev. Crowe Park for raising funds for the organization; and St. Bridget's Church has done the same on its grounds at the Parochial School. The children enjoy these tremendously - the merry-go-round, pop corn, taffy, hot dogs, all the whirling things that make up a carnival; the parents not so much, for it is a continuous dipping into the pocket, but as the French say, 'C'est la vie' - it's the kids' night out!

All dates are from the Maynard News. I am indebted to Ralph Sheridan for additional information.

Read at the February, 1968 meeting of the Maynard Historical Society--B. R. Koski