

**Overview**  
**Administrative Information**  
**Biographical Note**  
**Scope and Content Note**  
**Related Records**  
**Subject Headings**  
**Contents of the Collection**

## Overview

Repository	Archives The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art 5401 Bay Shore Road Sarasota, FL 34243 <a href="mailto:archives@ringling.org">archives@ringling.org</a>
Creator	Al Halpern (1922-1998)
Title	Al Halpern Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Hartford, Ct. Fire Research Collection
Dates	1964-1966
Extent	.5 linear feet
Language	English
Arrangement	Format, Subject
Summary	Al Halpern was an avid circus fan. He intended to write a book about the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus fire in Hartford, Ct., on July 6, 1944, but it was never completed. His collection contains photographs, correspondence, articles, and notes.

## Administrative Information

Provenance	Collection donated by Jan Y. Biggerstaff, accession A2022.0010
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**Cite as** Credit must be given for any use of materials. The credit line should read: The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Florida State University, Al Halpern Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Hartford, Ct. Fire Research Collection, and should include box and folder listing.

**Processing Note** Processed by Sarah Lewis, 2024. Collection was unarranged.

**Biographical Note** Al Halpern was an avid circus fan and a collector and dealer in circus memorabilia. He lived in Anaheim, California and was involved in the Circus Historical Society and was a member of the Circus Fans Association.

**Scope and Content Note** The collection holds Halpern's research material on the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Fire on July 6, 1944, in Hartford Connecticut. He intended to write a book about the fire, but it was never completed. The collection is largely correspondence, but also contains photographs, articles, and notes. He requests information through correspondence and by posting classified advertisements in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune. Notable are several firsthand survivor accounts and a report from Sheriff Mesner of Hartford, Ct. regarding identification of fire victims. The collection is incomplete, Halpern refers to photographs and accounts not documented in the collection.

### **Subject Headings**

Hartford Circus Fire, Hartford, Conn., 1944

Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Combined Shows

Circus

### **Contents of the Collection**

Folders

Photography:

1. (14), black and white (2.75 x 4.5), circus performance, sideshow tents, vehicles, circa 1923-1946.
2. (5), black and white (5x7), Hartford circus fire, 1944.

Correspondence: Individuals

3. Arsenault, Dolores; handwritten account of surviving the Hartford fire, 1963.
4. Barber, Tom; detective working on unidentified victim "Little Miss 1565," 1964.

5. Bodycott, Leon; offers photographs of fire and aftermath, 1964.
6. Erlandson, Sophia; worked at the Hartford hospital, offers news articles and secondhand accounts, 1964.
7. Geiger, Joseph; first-hand fire survivor account, was on high wire when fire broke out, 1964-1965.
8. Leonard; postcard about selling information to Halpern for the book, 1964.
9. Leonard, Bette, information about the fire, on Merle Evans Circus Museum letterhead, 1964.
10. Lowry, Velma; 8 correspondences, discuss everyday happenings, people associated with the Hartford fire, and her experience publishing a circus-related book, includes article clipped from Life Magazine, 1964-1966.
11. McKittrick, W. R.; offers to sell firsthand account of fire, 1964.
12. McSheffery, Rev. Father Daniel; newspaper article, fire survivor becoming fire department chaplain. Includes letters with Claude Johnson, Father McSheffery, article author John O'Brien, and article publisher Middletown Press, 1964.
13. Mesner, William; Sherrif, copy of report of handling and identification of fire victims, 1964.
14. Miller, Mary Jane; her and her husband were employees during fire, offers firsthand account, 1964.
15. Riley, Flo; offers to sell clippings, 1964.

#### Correspondence: Companies and Government Officials

16. Associated Press; answers letter forwarded by Rose Dunn, includes two news articles, 1964.
17. Connecticut Chamber of Commerce; inquiry forwarded to state library in Hartford, 1966.
18. Hartford Public Library; inquiry, 1966.
19. Ohio State Officials; regarding arsonist Robert Dale Segee, 1964.
20. Ohio State Officials; regarding arsonist Robert Dale Segee, 1966.
21. Ohio State Officials; regarding arsonist Robert Dale Segee, 1966.
22. Sarasota Herald-Tribune, regarding placing classified advertisement, 1964.
23. Time Magazine, about permission to use portions of articles, 1966.
24. Outgoing inquiries without responses (5), 1964-1966.

#### Article Clippings and Typed Copies

25. Article clippings (2), aftermath of circus fire, 1944 July.
26. Article, typed copy, "Important Fires of Circus History," 1944, September.
27. Articles (6), typed copies, regarding fire, arsonist, aftermath, 1944, 1950, 1953, 1954, 1962.
28. Newspaper clipping (partial); regarding arsonist Robert Dale Segee, 1950.
29. Articles (3), typed copies, regarding past circus accidents.
30. Article, typed copy, from Circus Letters, regarding Cole Brothers fire, 1965 March-April.

#### Research Notes

31. Research notes, partial handwritten transcript of unknown document regarding fire aftermath legal proceedings.
32. Research notes, handwritten.

#### Audio/Visual Material:

1-16 mm film, 1944 Hartford circus fire before and aftermath, run time: 1:52.