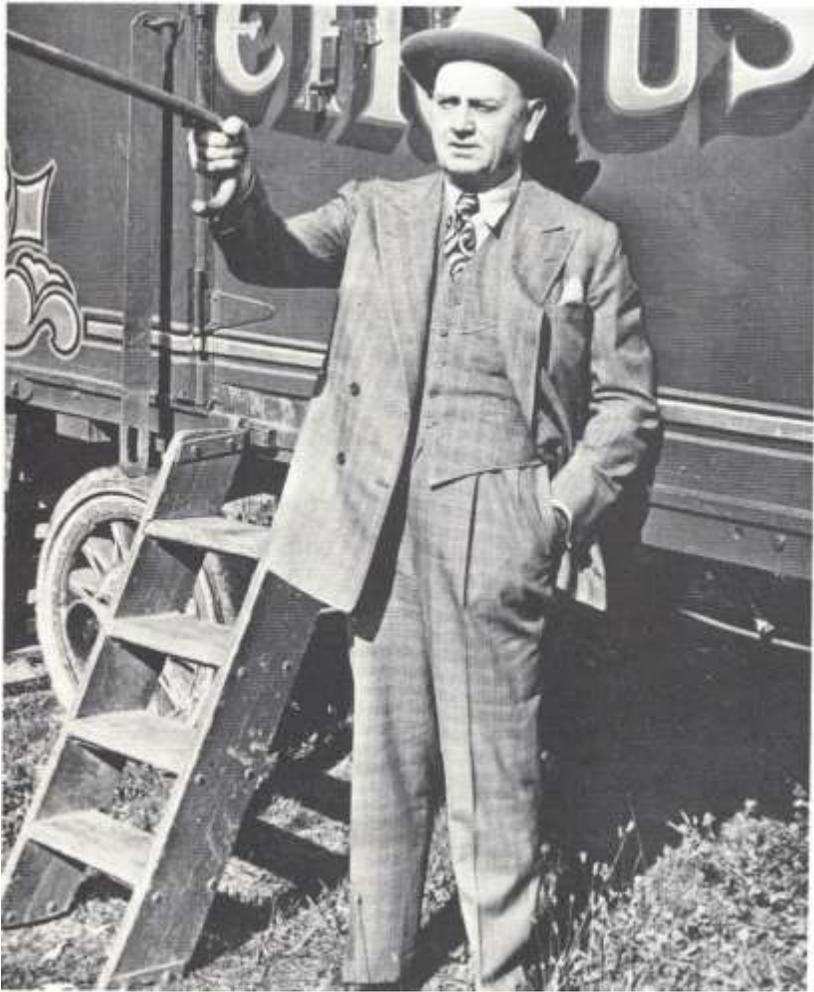


Zack Terrell (1879-1954)

By Jerry Long



Zack Terrell



The above photograph of Zack Terrell is on display at the Visitor Information Center/Tourist Commission Office on East Second Street in downtown Owensboro, KY. The

picture is mistakenly identified as circus man, C. C. Groscurth, in the book, A History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky, by Hugh O. Potter (1974, p.220). Groscurth was a protégé of Terrell and was reported as having a photo of Terrell hanging in his office which possibly accounts for the mistaken identification. The above picture is identified as Zack Terrell when it was published in the 31 March 1946 (p.1) edition of the Owensboro Messenger newspaper.



A History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky, Hugh O. Potter, Daviess County Historical Society, Owensboro, KY; Herff Jones-Paragon Publishing, Montgomery, AL, 1974, pp.193-194 and 220 (picture):



Zach Terrell and movie star, Tom Mix

Owensboro has been a good circus town since its early days... Zach Terrell was one of the many Daviess county boys to whom the circus had a special attraction. Unlike most of the others, he felt the lure of circus life so keenly that he decided to make it his life's career...

In 1935 Zach Terrell obtained sole ownership of the Cole Brothers Circus. In 1936 there were just four railroad circuses on the road in the United States—Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty, the Al G. Barnes, Cooper Brothers and Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey.

From 1940 to 1943 the number had shrunk to two, the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey and Cole. Bros.

Circus business improved and in 1944 a third show, Dailey Bros., took to the rails. In 1945 there were six, but in 1947 one of them failed to go out. In 1948, the year in which Zack Terrell

sold Cole Brothers Circus for a reported \$350,000 and retired, the number of railroad shows was back down to four.

On August 5, 1954, at the age of 75, Zack Terrell died while at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. His widow, who survived him and continued to make her home at the family place on the Leitchfield road, near Owensboro, was Estrella Nelson, a member of an English family of circus people who were chosen in 1969 as members of the Circus Hall of Fame in Sarasota, Florida. Her brother, Paul Nelson also made, his home on Rural Route 2, Owensboro.

The Nelson Troupe was composed of acrobat Arthur Nelson, (whose father, Robert, had arrived in America from his native England in 1866), Arthur's wife, the former Sara Warren and their children, Rosina, Oneida, Hilda, Theol, Estrella, Carmencita and Paul. Offering a superb, risley (foot balancing) acrobatic display, the Nelsons were featured with every big name circus in the U.S.A. from 1910 through 1935.



Daviess County, Kentucky, 1815-2015, Celebrating Our Heritage, Daviess County Bicentennial Committee, M. T. Publishing Company, Inc., Evansville, IN, 2015, p15
(“Daviess County Bicentennial Chronology – 200 Historical Events”, by Jerry Long):

December 1948 – After 43 years in the circus business Zach Terrell (1879-1954) retired and sold the famous Cole Brothers Circus. Under him it was rebuilt into a circus equal in magnitude to Ringling Bros., the largest American circus of the era. A native of Daviess County, he retired to his farm on the Leitchfield Road, near Owensboro, where Menards is now located. He was inducted into the International Circus Hall of Fame in 1991. His wife, Estrella Nelson, was a member of a famous circus family of acrobats and of the Circus Hall of Fame.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 19 June 1927, p.1B:

**Zack Terrill's Ancestral History Is
Told by Worcester, Mass., Newspaper**

The Worcester, Mass., Evening Post, of Tuesday, June 14, contains a lengthy story concerning Zack Terrell, Owensboro, manager and part owner of the Sells-Floto circus. The story was written by Earl Chapin, author of "Cuddy of the White Tops" and other stories of circus life.

Mr. Chapin goes into details concerning the methods used by Mr. Terrell in revolutionizing circus life. It is shown in this article that Mr. "Terrell's demand of his employes to show all courtesy to patrons has done much to make the Sells-Floto circus one of the greatest in the world. The Evening Post's article in part follows:

"Zack. Terrell's youth seemed to lead inevitably toward the circus. He was born in Ohio county, Kentucky, of the finest Virginia and Kentucky stock, near a stream picturesquely called Panther creek. His father was J. R. Terrell, a farmer of the county and noted as one of the most famous fox hunters in his state. He was nationally known among sportsmen as a raiser of fox hounds. When the young Zack (and it may be guessed" that he was christened Zacharia) had just

entered his teens his parents moted to Owensboro, and in that quaint Kentucky city the circus germ may be said to have first embedded itself in the boy. With three youthful cronies he 'promoted' weekly circuses, with pins and occasional pennies as the price of admission. And, interestingly enough, one of this boyish trio, Arthur B. Palmer, known to all as 'Judge' Palmer, may be found in charge today of the main entrances and ticket desks of Mr. Terrell's Sells Floto circus. Young Terrell became an inveterate theatregoer and was always among the first of the Owensboro gallery gods gathered at the gallery door of the old Temple theatre, eagerly awaiting a 'rush' seat to witness the performance of each visiting star in those days when cities like Owensboro were first class 'one-night stands.'

His First Job

"In 1904 young Zack Terrell obtained his first professional post in the show world when he was taken on with the old John Robinson circus as a concessionaire, in charge of the boys selling peanuts and the like among the audience. He went next to the Hagenbeck-Wallace show, where his astute showmanship soon manifested itself, and he served as an important member of the executive staff four years. He then joined the well known Jerry Musgivan and Bert Bowers, owners of Howe's Great London circus, with whom he remained until the and the late Louis Tillman became joint managers of the Great Sanger shows. In 1914 Mr. Terrell was appointed assistant manager. He held this position until 1920, when in November of that year, in association with Mr. Mugivan, Mr. Bowers and Ed Ballard, he bought the Sells Floto circus from H. II. Tammen and F. G. Bonfils, owners of the Denver Post. At that time the circus maintained winter headquarters at Denver but in 1922 the winter home was removed to Peru, Ind. Since 1921 Mr. Terrell has been general manager of the huge organization and has brought it to its present high place in its field.

Ancestry

"Few men connected with the amusement world, or any other, can lay claim to more distinguished ancestry than Zack Terrell, by the way. He is a direct descendant of that Richmond and William Terrell, of old Norman-English stock, who arrived in Virginia from England about the middle of the 17th century and settled near Richmond in that state. The Richmond records of 1670 contain the names of both brothers several times in connection with important state events. When the pair arrived in 1656 they carried some sort of official authority in connection with the crown lands in Virginia, either as surveyors or in some other important capacity, and large grants of choice land were received by both for their services. Richmond and William Terrell were the grandsons of Sir Timothy Tyrrell, of Oakley, Eng., and great-grandsons of Sir Edward Tyrrell, of Thornton. The latter was a direct descendant of Edward I, of England, and Eleanor of Castile, his wife, through the marriage of John Plantagenet, the daughter of Edward I, to Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester. This is the Joan of Acre, of history, so called as she was born during the siege of Acre in the Crusades, where Edward I, then Prince of Wales, was taking part, accompanied by Eleanor of Castile, his wife. With the settlement of the Tyrrels in Virginia the name became Terrell and divers branches of the family went to Kentucky, Georgia and as far west as Texas. All became staunch Americans and were well and gallantly represented in the Revolution. On Zack Terrell's ring is engraved in tiny letters the family motto: Sans Dieu, Rien: Without God, Nothing."



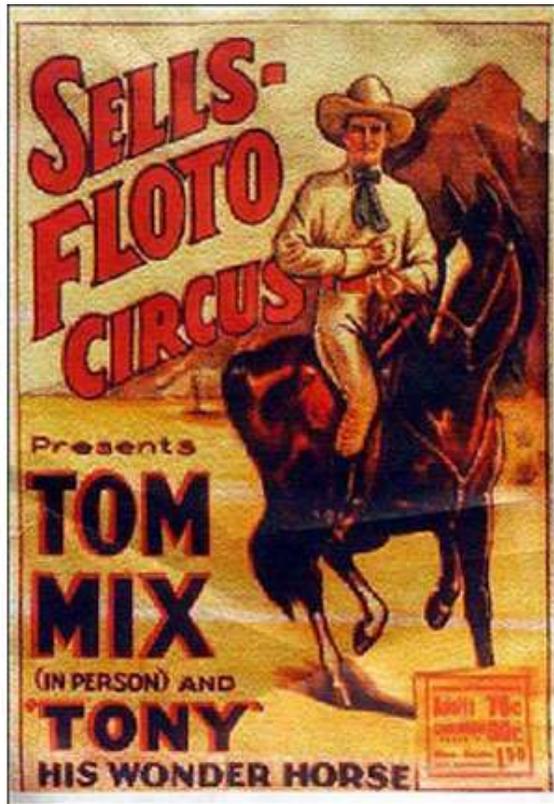
Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 14 August 1930, p.7:



Zack Terrell & Tom Mix



*Tom Mix and Tony in Pittsburgh, PA
May 16, 1931 when he was with
Sells-Floto Circus.*



**Zack Terrell Is Granted
Divorce In Chicago Court**

Chicago, April 3. (AP)—Zack Terrell, part owner of Coles Brothers circus, today was granted a divorce decree on grounds of cruelty by Judge Rudolph Desort from Mrs. Myrtle Terrell, who he said was a ward of the state of Kentucky because she is now insane.

The court stipulated Terrell must care for Mrs. Terrell financially. Attorney Raymond Kelner said Terrell had agreed to pay Mrs. Terrell \$50 a month for life and had given her their home near Owensboro, Ky.

Terrell said they were married in 1904 and that she left him in 1928. He filed his suit last November 30, more than a month before she was adjudged insane.

**Zack Terrill Is Married To
Elephant Trainer, Acrobat**

Announcement was made yesterday at Rochester, Ind., winter quarters for the Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Wild Animal circus, of the marriage of Zack Terrill, of Owensboro, president of the circus, to Miss Estrella Nelson, acrobat and elephant trainer. They were married in Chicago on April 22 while the circus was playing its opening engagement of the season. Terrill was recently granted a divorce from his former wife, in Chicago.

Chicago Tribune, Chicago, IL
11 May 1935, p.4:

Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY
10 May 1940, p.5:

Weds Circus Owner



ESTRELLA NELSON.

Zack Terrell, president of Cole Brothers-Clyde Beatty circus, and Estrella Nelson, acrobat and animal trainer, were married in Chicago on April 22 while the show was playing here. This announcement was made yesterday in Rochester, Ind., headquarters of the circus. Mr. and Mrs. Terrell are now in Lexington, Ky., with the circus.





Cole Bros. Circus letterhead



Courier-Journal Sunday Magazine, Louisville, KY, 23 February 1941, p.67:

**The Popcorn Boy
Bought a Circus**

**Big tent laid its spell 36 years
ago on Zack Terrell when the
posters went up in Owensboro**

By JAMES GOBLE

The boy watched the man with the red nose paste the circus poster on the barn there on the outskirts of Owensboro, Ky. Red Nose deftly slapped his paste brush here and there. Strip by strip the poster grew until it became a mass of color. It said the John Robinson Circus was coming to town. It showed riders risking their necks on horses galloping at a frenzied pace. The boy just stood and watched.

His mother rung the dinner bill at the back door of his home not far away.

"Come to dinner, Zack," she called.

Red Nose looked around and licked his lips.

"Wisht my name was Zack," he said.

The boy just stood and stared at the poster.

Long after Red Nose had gone the boy looked at that picture of a new and colorful world. He thought about it while he fed the chickens, while he drove horses hitched to wagon-loads of tobacco there on his father's farm.

One day the boy climbed on his yellow pony, Snowball, and tried to do the feats shown on the circus poster. 'Round and 'round he went on his pony. He did that day after day. The boy was just plain nuts about circuses.

So when that boy became a little older, he joined a circus—and it was the same John Robinson outfit that had played in Owensboro.

He wasn't hired to ride horses at breakneck speed. He wasn't hired to do flip-flops on their backs. He was hired to yell, "Peanuts, popcorn—5 cents a bag," and sell them for the concession men.

Owns second biggest

That was the way a circus career started thirty-six years ago for the Kentucky boy, Zack Terrell. Today he owns the world's second largest circus. That's the Cole Brothers Circus now wintering here at the State Fair Grounds.

During his career from peanut vendor to circus owner, Zack Terrell traveled over practically all the United States, over a large hunk of Canada. He tangled up with stampeding elephants. Helped nurse sick animals. He was the man who brought Tom Mix, Hollywood's cowboy movie star, to the circus world. He was associated with Clyde Beatty, the animal trainer, and Ken Maynard, another cowboy movie actor,

But first let's look at Zack Terrell's early circus career.

In 1905, he joined the Ben Wallace Circus. He was still merely a peanut vendor—but one with experience.

Then in 1912, Zack Terrell joined the Howes Great London Circus, owned by old Jerry Mugvian, who took a billygoat and a bear and built them into a holding company controlling five circuses.

Zack Terrell became manager of one of them—the Lord George Sanger Great European Show. That was some name. In fact, a little too much. So Zack Terrell's outfit bought the name of John Robinson Circus, the first one for which Terrell worked.

One night in Americus, Ga., Terrell's show took over its new name. Painters were lined up waiting for the last performance to end. When it did, they quickly painted out the long Sanger name on the wagons, cages, trunks and the forty-nine of everything that a circus has. They substituted the name, John Robinson Circus, and away the outfit rolled.

Zack Terrell took this circus through the cotton land. Wherever it played people came on foot, on mules and horses. White folks came on excursion trains, steam boats and in buggies.

Jerry Mugvian's company now controlled five circuses—Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sparks, John Robinson and Al G. Barnes. And Zack Terrell, the onetime peanut vendor, had an interest in the whole works.

The circuses did all right for themselves. They played the big time—New York, Boston, Chicago, every place this side of Catalina Island.

Signed Mix and Tony

Then came 1929, and the circuses were sold to John Ringling. Zack Terrell was retained as manager of the Sells-Floto Circus. Elephants, tigers, lions, clowns, acrobats, trapeze artists—the circus had them all. But Zack Terrell figured it needed one big drawing card. He thought and thought. So did the circus' higher-ups. One day they had it. There was one person who could fill the bill.

That person was Tom Mix.

Zack Terrell and Mix signed a contract. It stated that Mix was to receive the whopperish sum of \$10,000—a week! And the contract was for ten weeks.

Mix was given a private railway car for himself and his secretary. His horse, Tony, known to practically every youngster in America, was given a private car also.

And Sells-Floto had its drawing card—but it had little for Tom Mix to do.

Said Terrell: "Tom, you know the public expects you to do the stunts you did in pictures. I saw you ride Tony off a cliff into water. Why can't you do something like that for us?"

"Said Mix: "Zack, in the movies Tony stepped in and out of tubs of water. While he did that, somebody waved a sheet under him. It photographed like Tony was jumping into a lake."

Such is Hollywood.

"So Zack Terrell cooked up some acts for Mix. One of them was a bit of rifle shooting. A circus handyman threw glass balls into the air. Tom shattered them with expert rifle fire. The crowd ate it up.

There were many things about the circus that caused Zack Terrell no end of worry. There were railroad rates, broken equipment, acts to replace, and elephants, elephants, elephants.

Elephant hunts

Down in North Carolina one day, four of his elephants took off for parts unknown. Zack Terrell and his helpers chased them through half the state before catching them. Some of the elephants bore slight bullet wounds. It seemed they had been on the receiving end of gunfire from frightened North Carolina farmers.

And there was the day the circus unloaded at Cranbrook, British Columbia, up Canada way. The sun beamed nicely, everybody worked. Things were going in smooth-as-whipped-cream fashion. Then all at once it happened. Something scared the elephants. Eight of them took off in the general direction of the North Pole. The circus hands tried to stop them. But it was no use. The elephants were already in high gear.

There was nothing for Zack Terrell to do but organize a party of Indians and start after the elephants. The party got some camping equipment and headed up Mt. Baker.

One by one the elephants were captured—but it wasn't easy.

There was Myrtle, a dandy circus elephant, who liked the wide open spaces. She didn't want to be captured. Members of the searching party saw her several times. But they couldn't catch her.

One day Zack Terrell got himself a pitchfork and started out. The pitchfork was for self-protection in case Myrtle had ideas. The pitchfork is a favorite weapon used on rampaging elephants around circuses. Zack Terrell came upon Myrtle there in the wilds of Mt. Baker. They looked at each other. Zack Terrell smiled. Maybe he could bring her back. Then Myrtle started at him. Terrell swung his pitchfork into an offensive position. But Myrtle seemed to have forgotten it was something to fear. She came at him like an Army tank scooting down a steep ice-covered slope. Zack Terrell put the pitchfork over his shoulder and tore back the way he had come. For a while it looked as if the race would end in a tie. But Terrell finally won it.

And he also won a nickname from the Indians – "Big Chief Who Runs From Elephant With Pitchfork On Shoulder." Big Chief Terrell even negotiated with an airplane pilot to fly over Myrtle and dump some kind of concoction on her that would make her blind temporarily. She could be caught easily then. But the negotiations hit a snag and the stunt was never tried.

Shortly afterwards Myrtle was found dead of pneumonia. She had become sick there in the wilds. There were no trainers to keep her warm. There were no trainers to feed her linseed oil and

whisky and the other things that go into the mixture that is practically a cure-all for elephant ills. Zack Terrell hated to lose Myrtle.

At Chicago fair

Zack Terrell's days went by with their ups and downs. In 1933 he was no longer with Sells-Floto. The Standard Oil Company of Indiana asked him to stage the "Live Power Show" at the Chicago World's Fair. He accepted the offer.

Zack Terrell bought lions, tigers and elephants. He put on a whopper of a show. It was almost like a circus right there at the fair. But when it was all over, Zack Terrell had a lot of animals on his hands—and nothing to do with them.

And that's how he got started with the circus wintering in Louisville.

He took his animals to Rochester, Ind., and teamed up with Clyde Beatty, the animal trainer. They organized the Cole Brothers-Clyde Beatty Circus. After six months' work, they made it the second largest in the world. Only Ringlings' circus was larger.

Time went on and Zack Terrell obtained sole ownership of the show; which is now known as Cole Brothers Circus.

The Cole Brothers Circus was just about wiped out by fire that destroyed its winter quarters at Rochester in 1939. Several animals were lost. The show appeared headed for the rocks. Terrell borrowed and bought animals from circuses that had flopped, from Frank "Bring 'Em Back Alive" Buck, and from the Detroit zoo. The show kept on clicking. It found new winter quarters at the Kentucky State Fairgrounds and plans to use them from now on.

Terrell is still after big names for his show. Ken Maynard was with the outfit the past two years. Terrell said he is making an attempt to get Jack Dempsey and Buck Jones with the show next season.

Winter shine-up

Tom Mix would probably still be with the circus had he not been killed in an automobile out West. Mix had made a verbal agreement to appear with the show in 1941, Terrell said. Mix was en route to the circus, then in Hollywood, when his speeding automobile wrecked.

And if you think there's no work to a circus while it's in winter quarters, you ought to prowl around the Fairgrounds. There's more there than meets the eye and nose.

Zack Terrell spends a lot of time there. He keeps his eye on the repair shop, to which each circus wagon will go for repairs. Forges glow in that show. Hammers ring and drills bite through metal. And he keeps' his eye on other things out there.

There are the rooms with bunks for the circus hands. There is the harness shop, where leather trappings are made for horses. There's the wardrobe shop, where costumes are being made of gaudy materials. There are the buildings where animals are quartered. There are the buildings where trainers work with seals, with elephants, with other animals.

All that is there that the circus may open in bang-up fashion in the spring. It might cut loose in Louisville. There have been discussions about opening it in the Armory under the auspices of the State Fair and Bundles for Britain.

And that showing may be one of the last by a circus in the State.

Terrell said Kentucky's amusement tax is making it tough on all circuses that scatter sawdust in the Bluegrass State.

But as long as circus posters are slapped on Kentucky barns, you can bet Zack Terrell's will be among them.

If he drops by such a barn he might possibly stop and stand there, staring as he did when the red-nosed man stuck a poster on a barn at Owensboro thirty-six years ago.



Ken Maynard, star of Westerns and circus, poses with elephant and Mrs. Zack Terrell.



Zack Terrell came home Monday—bringing with him the second largest circus in the world—his Cole Brothers show.

Picture on left from Courier-Journal Sunday Magazine, Louisville, KY, 23 February 1941, p.67 and picture on right from Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 29 April 1941, p.8:



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 3 April 1946, p.4:

Zack Terrell Purchases Farm Of Uncle, Late Jess Johnson

Because of a sentimental attachment for the Johnson farm on the Leitchfield road and because he considered it a good buy for \$40,500, Zack Terrell bought the 160 acres of land, farm, home and other buildings that belonged to his uncle, the late Jess Johnson, at a public auction Tuesday morning.

Whether Mr. Terrell will convert a portion of the farm into winter quarters for his Cole Bros. circus cannot now be decided, he said. Except for its distance from railroad tracks the farm is an ideal winter quarters location for a circus, Mr. Terrell said. He added that this is not an insurmountable obstacle if railroad sidings which seem to be available can be procured and train sheds erected nearby. He recalled that when the Cole Bros. circus wintered at Peru, Ind., it was located four miles from the town proper.

Mr. Terrell made it plain that because the Johnson farm home has been his home for the last 20 years, and because of the many pleasant associations he has had there, among them his annual Christmas tree, he expects to keep it as his home the rest of his life.

"Owensboro has always been my home and always will be," Mr. Terrell said. "Whether I am able to establish winter quarters here or not, I am going to name my private car in the circus train for this place of my birth. If I can establish my quarters here nothing will please me better for it will be like coming home to stay and knowing I am among friends."

Winter quarters of Mr. Terrell's circus are now at the Kentucky State Fairgrounds, Louisville, where they have been for several years. He has invested \$25,000 in buildings there which would become the property of the state of Kentucky if he left. All other property of the circus could be transferred to Owensboro easily. Mr. Terrell's contract for use of the portion of the fairgrounds expires April 15, and it is now in Frankfort for renewal. Provision is made in it, however, that the circus may abandon its winter quarters there whenever it chooses.

Under the contract, the state receives a per cent of the admission charges paid by winter visitors to the circus zoo, a per cent of the proceeds from the four-day annual opening showings of the circus at Louisville, and also a rental charge for the use of the fairgrounds. While admissions received from visitors to the zoo might not be as great here, it was pointed out that the saving in the rental charge and the portion of proceeds the state receives from the opening shows in Louisville would offset that, partially.

During the last winter \$150,000 was expended by the circus in Louisville, and in the years winter quarters have been maintained there approximately \$750,000 has been spent in the city. Included in materials purchased in Louisville for use in readying the circus for its 1946 road tour was 20,000 gallons of red paint.

The Johnson farm will remain as it is, Mr. Terrell said, he having acquired farm machinery and other personal property there of the late Mr. Johnson from other of his heirs. Present occupant of the home is John Cooper, another nephew of Mr. Johnson.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 26 December 1948, p.1A:

Zack Terrell Sells The Cole Brothers Circus For \$350,000

Zack Terrell, who for the past thirty years has been connected with Cole Brothers circus, as manager, general manager and later owner, announced here Saturday the sale of his circus. The deal was closed recently in Louisville, the circus winter quarters.

Jack Tavlin, new general manager and vice president, reported the purchase price was \$350,000.

Purchasers of the show, which will retain its name, include New York, Chicago and Miami business men who incorporated under the name Hoosier circus corporation.

Mr. Terrell, who resides on the Leitchfield road, a short distance southeast of Owensboro, said that the new organization would probably retain ninety per cent of the executive officers. Noyles Burkhard, assistant manager under Mr. Terrell, has been retained as manager of the show. Frank O' Donnell, president of Peter Briedt Brewing company, Elizabeth, N. J., is the new president of the circus.

Despite reports to the contrary. Mr. Terrell will not be connected with the circus in any capacity. An Associated Press news story last night said that Mr. Terrell would work with the show next season in an advisory capacity.

Mr. Terrell said that he plans to leave here for a short time, after which he will return to his home in the county for a long needed rest.

"It has always been my intention in life to retire from the show business and return to my home town and take things a little easier," declared Mr. Terrell. "Now that I have sold my circus, that is just what I plan to do to come back to Owensboro and Daviess county and be among the friends I love."

Tavlin, the new general manager of Cole Brothers circus, said about \$200,000 will be spent to modernize equipment. He added there will be changes in the show's personnel, with new acts.

"Also the show never has been farther east than Buffalo, N. Y. We plan to take it to many eastern cities. We definitely are in competition with Ringling brothers," Tavlin announced.

He formerly was with Ringling brothers and also was part owner of the Clyde Beatty circus. He said negotiations are under way for the purchase of 150 acres in Miami to shift the circus' winter headquarters to Florida.

"It's not that we don't like Louisville," Tavlin said, "but we will have year-round visitors to the quarters in Miami." The show wintered at Louisville since 1940. Its lease expires this winter.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 30 December 1948, p.8:

Zack Terrell To Be Daviess County Farmer

Zack Terrell has done what many men of means plan for, but never reach the starting point. He has sold the business that has been his life since he was a young man, and is getting ready to establish his permanent residence in the big pillared mansion on the Leitchfield road. The Cole Bros. circus, with which Zack Terrell has been identified for many years, and of which he has been manager and chief owner so long one never thinks of Zack without thinking about the circus, has become the property of another, and Zack has returned to Owensboro to enjoy the leisure of a gentleman farmer. The big house by the side of the road was purchased by him a few years ago, and he set carpenters and other workmen to restoring it to Zack's original ideas of making it a typical southern planter's home.

Zack Terrell is no stranger come to live in this community, to dazzle the neighbors with the splendors of a palatial home made possible by the application of good business principles to a circus. He is one of the neighbors who knows the house, every acre of the farm and what crop is most adaptable to the fertile bottom land and the highly productive ridge extending back from the road to what in Zack's boyhood was a heavily timbered lowland alongside the I. C. railroad. All the years since Zack became a transient dweller in his own country, he had held a cherished vision of a comfortable dwelling on the highland overlooking the farm, and a front porch under which he would sit on hot summer days.

And the white house set in an ample yard, with a pond in front and turkeys and ducks and geese to ruffle the surface of the water with restless wings, is the home he kept before him as he rode through the states to entertain and instruct the multitudes that flowed about and into the spreading tents of the Cole Bros. circus. The Terrell residence is tall, taller than the average house

of the pattern, and occupying the crest of the farm's highest acres commands attention. Near the main house are the dwelling place of caretaker, the garage to contain several cars, and barn after barn for cattle and hogs and sheep and tobacco and corn and hay, and spreading implement sheds to shelter from the weather all the necessary and most modern farm tools, and Zack will enjoy watching his farm partners at work.

In selecting his permanent home, the veteran showman did not go many miles from the city, but almost within sight of Owensboro toward which he instinctively turned at the close of day is the big house by the side of the road. There on the lawn that slopes from mansion to highway, the retired circus owner and manager will welcome old friends and invite them to stay a while, as neighbor farmers in his boyhood bade visitors linger. Zack Terrell was like other men in building in his mind the ideal home about which he dreamed and planned and hoped for. But unlike those men who delay retirement until old age overtakes them, Zack Terrell sold his circus and with the big house by the side of the road ready for himself and his wife, spring will see the former showman a Daviess county farmer within a few minutes of town.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 14 August 1949, p.1B:

**Circus Executive, Back Home To Stay,
'Wouldn't Trade Places With Anybody'**

By John Hager and John Potter

Country Boy Zack Terrell who became Circus Owner Zack Terrell and who now is Farmer Zack Terrell is having the time of his life.

"You've heard that old saying that you can take the boy out of the country but can't take the country out of the boy, haven't you?" he asked at his 175 acre farm a short distance southeast of Owensboro on the Leitchfield road, to which he has retired. "Well, that goes for me exactly. I've been all over the United States and Canada but I never forgot Daviess county and the country and now that I'm back I wouldn't trade places with anybody."

Reminders Abound

Back in his native section to stay, Mr. Terrell brought reminders of his circus days to his farm. First and foremost of those reminders is Mrs. Terrell, former circus equestrienne and member of the famous Nelson Family troupe, but there are others.

He and Mrs. Terrell, in order to see their circus reminders, need only glance from almost any one of the windows of their remodeled Southern colonial style residence which is located in a picturesque tree-studded setting. A glance out a south window will show them nine red and yellow circus wagons which were left over from the sale by Mr. Terrell last year of his Cole Bros. Circus. They are located behind a barn and in a tobacco patch. A glance out an east window will show them Pal and Clovis, a pair of beautiful palomino stallions which are holdovers from the circus. A glance out a north window will provide them a view of race horses and riding horses of the type used by circus performers, or even of Lee Rose McAdams, a dapple grey five-gaited stallion which was a circus star and which is Mrs. Terrell's favorite mount. A glance from a west window will show them a pasture in which still other circus reminders, including a palomino mare and her colt, and tiny circus ponies roam with 52 white-faced heifers – a new venture for the Terrells.

Cattle Appeals to Showman

The cattle can hardly be said to have circus appeal, but of these creatures Mr. Terrell says "I love cattle. It's a pretty sight to see them on a farm."

In reminiscent mood, the old showman who started his circus career 45 years ago as a peanut salesman with the old John Robinson circus, takes a visitor back over the years to a barn on the farm in Ohio county near Pleasant Ridge, on which he was reared.

"I remember just as well as if it were yesterday," Mr. Terrell starts, and then he tells how the weather was warm and how it was getting time for the annual visit of the circus. He tells, too, how the circus bill poster was putting a colorful circus advertisement on the side of the barn, and how he was watching the operation with great interest.

"Come on, Zack! Dinner's ready,' I heard my mother call to me," he related. "Then that circus bill poster said 'It may be dinner time for you, Zack, but not for me.' Yes, I remember just as well as if it were yesterday."

Played Circus Here

Mr. Terrell was only a boy then, but that circus bill poster started him thinking of little other than the circus. Later he moved to Owensboro with his family and it was here that he played at what was to become his work during most of his life – the circus.

The move from Ohio county to Owensboro was complete with a yellow pony owned by young Zack, and that yellow pony was one of the principal parts of the first circuses he and his friends staged in a tent made of coffee sacks. The young performers used the animal as a barrier over which to leap.

After joining the John Robinson show as a peanut salesman, Mr. Terrell worked his way up and wound up owning 5 and three-fourths per cent of it. Then In 1921 he purchased 25 per cent of the Sells-Floto circus and managed it from 1921 until 1932 when it was taken from the road. His circus career was temporarily interrupted then, and for a time during the Century of Progress exposition at Chicago in the thirties he ran the "Live Power Show" for Standard Oil of Indiana.

Formed Cole in 1935

"That was the biggest animal act in the United States, and after the fair closed in 1934 we had a bunch of animals on our hands so we wintered at Rochester, Ind., and in 1935 put out the Cole Bros. circus." Mr. Terrell recalls.

The Cole Bros. title, he explained, was purchased by him and his partner, Jess Adkins, and had no particular meaning. It is just a good, time-proven circus name. Mr. Terrell and Mr. Adkins operated the circus as partners until the death of Mr. Adkins in 1940. After that it was under the sole ownership of Mr. Terrell.

All of the Terrell circuses were well known to Owensboroans. The circus magnate always remembered his home town, the place he started in show business and the friends here who were among his staunchest supporters. He always routed his circuses through Owensboro. and an Owensboro stop had become such a part of the circus schedule that this year, even after Mr. Terrell had sold the Cole Bros. show, it again made its first road stop of the season at Owensboro.

Home Folks Treated Fine

"How did the people of Owensboro treat me?" Mr. Terrell asks. "Fine. They never let me down."

About those race horses? Why I'll take you out and show you," he asked and volunteered.

One had to go but a short distance to see them. They have the freedom of the front and back yards around the 100-year-old home which Mr. Terrell purchased three years ago following the death of his uncle, Jess Johnson. Mr. Johnson had resided there from 1913, and Mr. Terrell's mother made her home there for a time, too. Not only do the horses have the freedom of the yard, but so do wild Canadian geese, mallard ducks and Chinese geese.

"Race horses" is really the term for the animals on the lawn. Two mares. Grand Rush by Jacopo, and K. Cupcake, may never have been well-known on the race track, but certainly the sire of the colts which follow the mares was heard from. He is Gallahadion, winner of the 1940 Kentucky Derby.

Does Mr. Terrell have ambitions regarding the run for the roses at Churchill Downs? Mr. Terrell is noncommittal on that.

One thing he is committal on, though, and that is that he intends to breed and race his horses.

Sentiment Attached

Sentiment is attached to much of that on the farm. Pointing out several riding horses, Mr. Terrell explained that Mrs. Terrell would not let him sell them with the circus. "Wouldn't have wanted to anyway," he said. "She gets too much joy out of them."

But the most exotic of the horses from the big tent and the sawdust ring are the palominos – the horses with the light tan bodies and the lighter, tan manes and tails. No circus owner could hardly retire without a few of them around. Palominos are bred little, if at all, east of the Rocky mountain area. So, Mr. Terrell may take a revolutionary step in horse breeding in Kentucky, certainly in Daviess county.

To produce a palomino, Mr. Terrell said, it is necessary to cross a palomino with a sorrell. Either sex may be palomino or sorrell, but the result will always be a palomino, he added.

More yet, Mr. Terrell is breeding the tiny circus ponies that win the hearts of all his young visitors. The mother of one such visitor told Mr. Terrell that after a visit her young son wanted to move a cot into the stall with his favorite, Buttons.

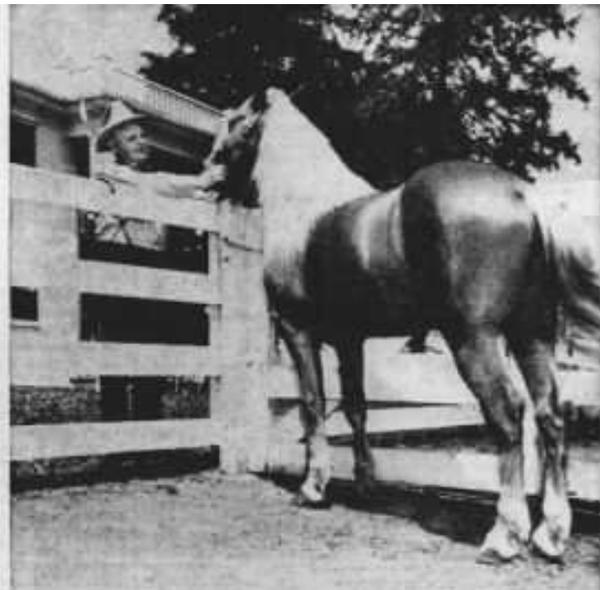
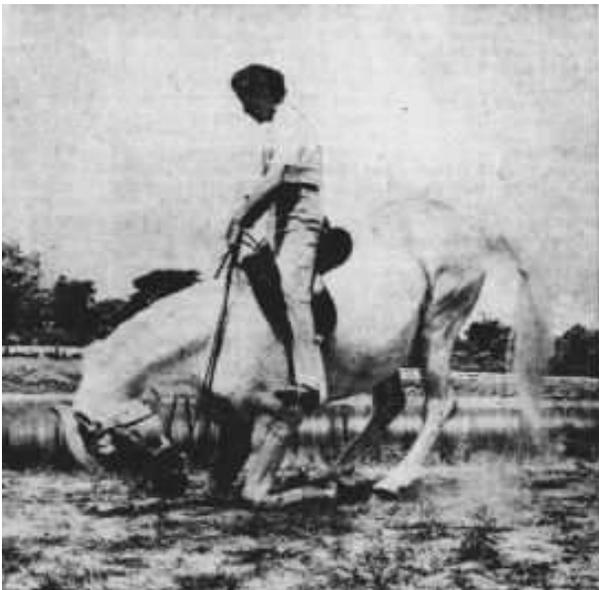
Growing Farm Crops

Mr. Terrell is more than a horse breeder and a retired circus executive. On his farm he is growing eight acres of burley tobacco, 75 acres of corn and all the hay that will be required to feed his animals this winter.

The usual farmer is not likely to have old circus wagons around his place, but if one should show up, Mr. Terrell has a few suggestions to offer.

Of the nine he kept, he will use four for corn cribs. Another, which was used to transport a famed riding seal, has a tank in it and Mr. Terrell uses that for baby ducks in springtime. If they were left to run free and swim in the lake, which has been formed between Leitchfield road and the Terrell residence, they would be eaten by turtles. They are safe in the seal's tank wagon, though.

Yes, Farmer Terrell thinks back on the days when he was Circus Owner Terrell. In fact he still keeps up with the Cole show and can tell where it is showing on any particular day. But as for wanting to go back in the circus business, he does not. He wants to stay just where he is.



Top left: The residence Mr. and Mrs. Terrell occupy is located in a picturesque tree-studded setting, and a glance from any of its windows gives a view of something that brings back memories of years of circus life. **Top right:** More than a retired circus owner, Mr. Terrell is also a farmer now that he has come back to Daviess county to stay. On his 175 acre farm he grows eight acres of burley tobacco, 75 acres of corn and hay for his animals. **Bottom left:** Mrs. Terrell for years a circus equestrienne and member of the famous Nelson Family troupe rides the horses on the farm. Lee Rose McAdams, dapple grey circus stallion goes through his paces for Mrs. Terrell. **Bottom right:** No circus owner could retire to the farm without taking with him some of the beautiful palomino horses which are part of the show. Mr. Terrell is no exception. Pal, a stallion, is one of the palominos on the Terrell farm.



Pictures – **Top:** The Highway traveler gets this view of the Terrell farm. The sign on the fence leaves little doubt in those who do not know that the man who lives there and whose name the sign bears have had something to do with animals. **Center:** This scene on the Terrell farm, located a short distance from Owensboro on the Leitchfield road, is pastoral rather than a reminder of the big top and the sawdust ring. Grazing alongside the lake which has been formed between the 100-year-old residence and the highway are two mares retired from the race track, Grand Rush and K. Cupcake, and their colts by Gallahadion, winner of the 1940 Kentucky Derby. **Bottom:** Tiny circus ponies were also brought to the farm and are the delight of many young visitors, including Bernard Dickerson, grandson of the Terrell cook. Bernard, 4, had a big time with this pony, Buttons. One young visitor wanted to move his cot into Buttons' stall.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 14 August 1949, p.8B:

Zack Terrell Finds Contentment At Home

Since Zack Terrell sold the circus – Cole Brothers – that had been long identified with his name and his fame as a showman, to lead the life of a farmer on the Leitchfield road, the public has seen little of him. He has been allowed to "live in his house by the side of the road" and rest from the strenuous labors of many years. His beautiful home a few miles out from town would seem to be the ideal place where a man who had been dealing with the public from his youth would choose to live in the quiet of a retirement earned by close attention to detail. And the pillared mansion will be home to Mr. and Mrs. Terrell, although both may at times be tempted to return for a season to the glamor of the show rings. Mr. Terrell admitted, when he converted the old red brick house into a palatial dwelling place, that to remain in seclusion would not be easy.

Mr. Terrell went about the business of retiring in a practical way. He didn't locate in some large city where people of prominence and wealth would be inviting him to parade with them. But he came home where he could be himself; where he could raise fine horses and cattle and tobacco and corn, and plant a few fruit trees; where he could sit on the lawn beside the lake between the house and the highway. Few famous men ever reach the point in life where they can be natural. Nothing is harder for a man who has earned the plaudits of the public than to withdraw from the limelight that beats upon him. Zack Terrell fancied that he could. And he came home with money enough to make himself comfortable, to do as he pleased about working and loafing. But to any man who has worked hard since he was old enough to earn his way, there is no escape from it, try as he may.

Mr. Terrell has succeeded better than most men when he chose to do the opposite thing from that in which he had been engaged. To please the public was what this master showman planned to do, and how well he did it is eloquently testified to by those familiar with his career. As a boy he wanted to direct a show; to collect people and animals and train them as performers. And he did that. The years were good to him, and when he began to talk about retiring spending the remaining years of his life amid the environments of his boyhood that appealed to him. So he came back to Owensboro, 'before he retired, and bought the farm he had been acquainted with all his life, and changed the style of architecture until the farmhouse was the kind of house he wanted for his own. And there the famous showman lives as he often dreamed. In the fine old home in a new dress Zack Terrell may at times long for the open road, the nights of intense activity, the mornings of radiance when the sun comes up to shine against the spangled equipment; and who

could blame this veteran of the circus for looking back toward the broad level plains across which his long trains rolled to new circus grounds, toward high mountains in the West up which loaded cars toiled, toward the seas where many of his employes felt an urge to go abroad. These and many other experiences must be Zack Terrell's at times, as he walks across the lawn to the typically Southern home, or strolls back in the fields where the showman turns farmer, with his horses and cattle and his corn and tobacco. Fortunate is the man who finds contentment at home after years of labor and planning have rewarded him.



Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, 25 June 1950, p.3C:

Zack Terrell Has Weathered Just About Every Misfortune That Possibly Could Befall In 45 Years of Circus Life

When only a boy, he learned that the odds favored the man who ran the game; today, at 71 and retired, he can look back on the greatest circus career ever achieved by a Kentuckian. He earned as much as \$20,000 a year as circus manager, and his trickery earned Tom Mix the reputation of a dead shot. Today, circus wagons stand on his farm, one made into a chicken house.

KENTUCKY PERSONALITIES
By Allan M. Trout



OWENSBORO, Ky., June 24. Sixty-odd years ago, James Robert Terrell rented a team of mules, a scraper, and his son, Zack, to work on a levee at 50 cents a day. Zack drew his first week's wages of \$2.75, mounted his yellow pony on Saturday, and rode to a picnic.

Jarrett Barrens had set up a game of chance at the edge of the picnic grounds. The boy stopped and lost his \$2.75. He got to the picnic flat broke, but it taught him the first lesson of his life, namely: The odds are always in favor of the man who runs the game.

At about that time, an advance man plastered his father's barn with posters advertising the Owensboro showing of John Robinson's Circus. Zack was entranced by the pictures of Billy DeMont, the bareback rider. For weeks thereafter, he imitated the postures of DeMont upon the bare back of his yellow pony.

Today, at 71, Zack Terrell lives in idyllic retirement after the greatest circus career ever achieved by a Kentuckian. His top salary as manager was \$20,000 a year. In his 45 years on the road, this native of Daviess County owned an interest in, or was connected with, every major circus in the United States. He has traveled 750,000 miles to show time and time again in every city of this country and Canada.

Met All Setbacks

Terrell has strong-armed his way out of enough trouble to kill a dozen ordinary men. He has suffered every setback that circus flesh is heir to – fires, floods, train wrecks, tornadoes, elephant stampedes, attachments and bankruptcy. He well has earned the days of dawdling, and the nights of sweet sleep, that now are his on the 175-acre farm that once belonged to his uncle, Jesse R. Johnson, a mile southeast of Owensboro.

With wealth aplenty, Terrell is developing the old Johnson farm into an estate of rural beauty. He has refurbished the brick mansion built 100 years ago, and created a two-acre lake between it and the Leitchfield Pike. He is restoring the land and hiding it under a green carpet of grass and clover.

Around him are a herd of White Face cattle, a stable of racing and saddle stock, a pair of fine hounds, some game chickens, and a whimsical collection of wild ducks and geese native to the United States, Canada, Egypt and China. Three circus wagons stand out back. One has been converted into a chicken house.

Terrell was born September 2, 1879, in a log house on Panther Creek, near Sugar Grove Church. His father named him Otis. But the baby's grandfather, John L. Terrell, came by and changed his name to Zachariah. The father was in no shape to defend his choice of Otis at the time, being abed with measles.

Bought A Saloon

The boy's father was overseer of 3,000 acres of land owned by Kit Jackson, his brother-in-law. But the bright lights of Owensboro beckoned, and around 1890 he moved to town and bought the Neal House, a combination hotel and saloon. He later acquired two other saloons, the Turf Exchange, and 619 East Main.

Young Zack got to the fifth grade in Owensboro. He tended bar for his father, tried his hand at a wheel factory, and stemmed tobacco for Gilmore Brothers. Thus the boy more or less roughed it until his father's happy-go-lucky attention to everything but business led him to bankruptcy.

Then Zack left home and landed in Louisville. His first venture was a small casino upstairs over John DeWitt's Diamond Saloon at Fifth and Jefferson. 'Twas in the same room that Ed Alvey, from Lebanon, had made his Louisville debut in bookmaking. Terrell, in fact, was the first operator after Alvey's departure for bigger quarters.

The Diamond Saloon was so called from diamond-shaped insets in the floor, with a \$20 gold piece in the center, and a silver dollar at each corner. Terrell lingered there four or five years. He was on the operating side of the game now, the side where the odds are. Then he shifted to Chester Park at Cincinnati for two years.

The first year in Terrell's early career that can be nailed with assurance is 1904. When his old love, Jack Robinson's Circus, opened that year in Covington, the new bull-lunged vender of peanuts, popcorn and soda pop was Zachariah Terrell.

Won The Money

Terrell hawked his wares one season, and played poker on the side. Here is where he finally got acquainted with Billy DeMont, the bareback rider who fired his imagination back on Panther Creek. Billy got paid off in silver dollars, which Zack won at poker every pay day.

For the next three years, Terrell and a small group of friends worked county fairs in the South. This operation was called hop-scotching. It might be one thing at this fair, and another thing at the next fair.

Meanwhile, Joe Brown left the group and scouted New York. He wired his friends to come ahead. Here is the pitch he had found: In return for voting in a Jersey City election, the boys would be given certain concession rights at an exposition on the bank of the Hudson River.

Upon arrival in New York, the boys were given coupons to vote in Jersey City. The first two were arrested and slapped in jail. Terrell and Willie Silva, his good friend from Newport, Ky, were standing behind. They dropped their coupons in a spittoon and left at once.

Terrell worked the season of 1908 with Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. Greener pastures, appeared, however, this time at Newport. Mayor Hunt had clamped the lid on Cincinnati. Trolley fare across the river to Newport was 5 cents. Charles Bollinger, Louisville, bought a palatial house a few steps from the Newport end of the bridge. There he and Terrell and Willie Silva became partners in the Iroquois Club, Inc., a swank casino catering exclusively to Cincinnati clientele. This venture lasted three years at no great profit, but in it lay the turning point in Terrell's career.

Added Two Rings

One of the Iroquois patrons was Jerry Mugifan, the noted Irish genius at circus management. He and Terrell became good friends. Terrell got on a train at Wilmington, N. C, one day in 1912, bound for Montgomery, Ala. From the train window nearing Fayetteville, N. C, he noticed posters of the Howes-London Circus, owned by Mugifan. He got off the train at Fayetteville and quickly joined Mugifan's staff.

The spring of 1913 found Terrell manager of a Mugifan subsidiary, Sanger's Greater European Circus. The Irishman expected this venture to lose money, but he guaranteed Terrell \$3,000 and 10 per cent of the net. Terrell added two end canvas rings to the wooden ring in the center. He was in Canada that season when Harry K. Thaw, the 1906 slayer of Stanford White, escaped from an insane asylum and was reported to have hidden out north of the border. Terrell kept one eye peeled for Thaw, hoping to bill him as an added attraction.

Terrell's international swing that season made \$87,000. He had arrived in the circus business.

Bought Part of Circus

Meanwhile, Mugifan had paid \$2,500 for name rights to a rundown show called Danny Robinson's Carnival. In the spring of 1914, therefore, we find Terrell faring forth as manager of the Famous Robinson Circus. For that, and succeeding seasons, the show cashed in on the beloved reputation of old John Robinson's last name. Such piracy seems to be an accepted evil of the circus business. John Robinson IV Is today one of Terrell's good friends.

By 1919, Terrell was ahead \$40,000 in cold cash. That year he paid \$37,500 for one-fourth interest in Sells-Floto Circus, until then run as a plaything by Harry Tammen, fabulous co-publisher of The Denver Post. The first year he made it pay all the \$219,000 it cost, plus a nice dividend to the new owners.

In 1922 Terrell's 25 per cent interest in Sells-Floto became a 5 ³/₄ per cent interest in the new \$2,000,000 American Circus Corporation. Under this corporate set-up were gathered all the big ones, except Ringling Brothers. When Ringling finally bought out his rivals in 1929, Terrell's share was \$100,000. He had parlayed his 1913 guarantee of \$3,000 into a fortune.

John Ringling, the consummate showman, invited Terrell to dinner at the incomparable Ringling mansion at Sarasota, Fla. What the hard-fisted Daviess Countian saw there he will never forget.

"We arrive," he says, "and the house manager shows us around. The place is like a cathedral. A yacht is tied to the front porch. Up yonder is a pipe organ.

Tom Mix Was There

"We walk through single rooms as big as a house. 'We are now about to enter the mawster's room,' the guide says, and, by God, it is the master's room.' The bath is made out of onyx. The bar is what used to be at the Waldorf-Astoria.

"And then we come to the dining room. It is both wide and long. John Ringling is at the head of the table. By his side is an imported parrot in a fancy little cage. He talks to the parrot, and the parrot talks to him. A couple of Europeans are there. Interior decorators, I think. We all sit down."

And from that sitting, Terrell arose as Ringling's manager of Sells-Floto, combined with Tom Mix. Ah, Mix! There was the drawing card to which Terrell, before or since, has never seen the equal. 'Twas Terrell, in fact, who presented Mix upon his first entry into the circus business, before Ringling acquired him in the American Circus Corporation deal.

The first season out with Mix, Terrell drew from \$17,000 to \$20,000 at stands worth less than half that gross in previous seasons. Mix was every inch a gentleman, but he couldn't do much except show himself off astride Tony, his fabled horse. But he more than earned his salary of \$10,000 a week, plus private cars for self and horse.

Used Scatter Shot

The resourceful Terrell, however, filled the blank spots in Mix's dexterity as an actor, minus his daredevil double of the film. High in the tent he rigged a target of thick wood. From the target he dangled white balls, on the order of table tennis balls.

In Chicago, Terrell found some pistol and rifle ammunition loaded with small shot instead of a single ball. Thereafter, when Mix aimed in the general direction of the target he was bound to crack one of the little balls. To this good day, it thrills Terrell to remember that every time Mix popped one of the little balls 15,000 spectators gasped in unison.

Terrell had Tony painted on canvas, hung it over a tent on the midway, put the horse inside, and charged admission to the sideshow. In one season, he sold \$16,000 worth of handkerchiefs emblazoned with the picture of Tom Mix and Tony.

Terrell reached his glorious height as a showman at the World's Fair in Chicago. An oil company conceived the notion of portraying the sleek power of gasoline by wild animals jumping from swing to swing, from perch to perch. Terrell signed a nice contract to deliver a colossal wild-animal act.

He borrowed some lions and tigers that Ringling had farmed out to the Cincinnati Zoo. He went to Lancaster, Mo., and selected Juno, Kitty and Tony from the herd of 30 outlaw elephants that Bill Hall had bought from bankrupt shows. He signed up some trainers. He persuaded Arthur Nelson, paternal head of the famous Nelson family of acrobats, to let him have a son, Paul, and two daughters, Estrella and Carmiseta.

Stayed In Louisville

The animal act was terrific, thanks to Terrell's ingenuity and the generous cash the oil company invested in the setting. The climax, however, followed the main act. The Nelsons emerged into the arena, through the animal chutes, all three costumed as tigers. With Estrella as ringmaster, they performed an acrobatic parody of the animal act.

Terrell showed his act to 9,000,000 people at the World's Fair. He married Estrella Nelson in 1935, and she now is his gracious and congenial hostess to circus friends who visit them from all parts of the country. Mrs. Terrell is an accomplished equestrienne.

Close, of the fair found Terrell with fee-simple title to a big menagerie of tigers, leopards and lions. It was around these animals that Terrell organized Cole Bros. Circus in 1935, with Jesse Adkins as partner, and Clyde Beatty, the noted trainer, as added attraction.

Terrell became sole owner in 1940, the year he first used the State Fairgrounds at Louisville for winter quarters. He sold the circus in 1948, was compelled to repossess it, and then sold it again, this time to Hop-along Cassidy and associates.

Some years ago, Terrell can't remember exactly, Earl Chapin May attached himself to the circus to write an article for American Magazine. May breezed through his introduction, wrote the body of his article without trouble. But a climactic ending stumped him. After days of search and worry, May finally hit upon the idea of asking this question of everybody on the lot: "Why are you with the circus?"

From Terrell on down, nobody could give him an intelligent answer. At last May popped his question to Willie Overton, a tall and loose-jointed Negro from Louisiana who wore size 16 shoes. Willie crossed his long legs and wiggled one ponderous foot. His face brightened in a moment, and he smiled to May:

"Just because."

"That answer," Terrell says, "comes nearest to it than anything I have seen or heard in 45 years in the circus business."



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 13 September 1953, p.2D:

**Beatty Top Showman Of Circus World
Zack Terrell Says Of His Ex-Protege**

By Jimmy Jones

The setting was peacefully pastoral. A few ponies grazed in the neat, white-paneled paddocks hard by the stately old mansion that crowns the high ridge sloping back from Leitchfield Road. In the brown fields one could see black Angus cattle and on a little oval lake in front of the house near the highway, geese and ducks floated placidly. there was nothing about the setting to

suggest the gaudy atmosphere of the circus, excepting a few old wagons parked in the back yard near the barns with "Cole Brothers" painted on their sides, letters now growing dim from the daily battering of the elements but still suggestive of brighter, merrier days.

That is the impression one gets when he drives up the long driveway that leads to the beautiful 175-acre estate where Zack Terrell, Owensboro's most famous figure of a bygone circus era, now lives in quiet retirement. He has lived there with Mrs. Terrell since he sold Cole Brothers, his proudest circus creation, for \$350,000 in December, 1948, to climax 45 colorful years in show business.

But although the raucous cries of midway barkers, the crack of the lion tamer's whip, the capering of clowns and the laughter of children are but memories to Zack Terrell now, they are still bright memories. One relives these memories as he sits under the shade trees on the lawn with "Colonel Zack" and listens while he spins stories of the good old days when there were 20 circuses on the road every one of them a "railroad show."

"Railroad" Man

When Zack uses the word, "railroad show," he does so with reverence. To him, many of the motorized circuses now on the road are little more than overgrown carnivals. To Zack, a real circus is a caravan of 35 or 40 cars that travels on rails and boasts first class wild animal and equestrian acts and a real menagerie. That's the kind of circus that Zack always had and he'll remain that kind of circus man until he dies.

Such a circus was Cole Brothers, Zack's last circus, and there are only two of that kind left on the road today. They are Ringling Brothers-Barnum and Bailey and the Clyde Beatty circus which comes to Owensboro Monday for two performances at the Fairgrounds.

"After the minnow comes the whale," said Zack, using an old circus phrase. "We've seen a lot of circuses in Owensboro this year, but we haven't seen one like the Beatty show. Clyde has a really great show and I don't feel the slightest hesitancy in recommending it. Beatty is the greatest animal trainer and the finest showman left in the business ... his act, in which he works 30 lions and tigers in the same arena, is worth the price of admission alone."

Clyde Beatty pronounced with accent on the e – is Zack Terrell's boy and he makes no bones about it. He first took note of Beatty when the regular trainer for Hagenbeck-Wallace lost his nerve one night and Clyde, then merely a cage boy one who cleans out animal cages took his place and finished out the act. From then on he was the regular trainer.

When Zack teamed up with another showman named Jess Atkins to form Cole Brothers in 1935 his first act was to sign Beatty to a contract and have his name painted on all the circus wagons.

"We featured Beatty and his act everywhere we went and the crowds flocked to see him," said Zack.

Old Friends

Terrell recalls many stories about Beatty, including the time the trainer was bitten by a lion while breaking in some animals at Peru, Ind. He lay at death's door for many days with a temperature of 120 and doctors were summoned from everywhere. A lion's bite, says Terrell, is as poisonous as that of a rattlesnake. Beatty won the battle and went right on training, his nerve as steady as ever.

Lions and tigers are deadly enemies and Beatty's biggest concern while in the ring is to keep a fight from breaking out between them. Once this happens, a trainer's life is in jeopardy.

"The toughest spot I ever saw Beatty in came while he was with Cole Brothers," Terrell, said. "A tiger named Rosey that Beatty valued very highly because it would roll over on command, got into a fight with a black-maned lion. Beatty tried vainly to separate them but it ended in a death battle with the lion killing the tiger. Beatty knew that if the fight ever became general, his act would be wrecked and many valuable animals killed, so he stayed in the arena until order was restored and the animals safely back in their cages."

Kindness Wins Them

Terrell says that Beatty teaches his big cats to perform through kindness, rather than cruelty. The lions and tigers are broken during the winter and early spring before the circus takes the road. The cats are led into the ring one at a time with a collar and a rope. Each cat is taught to take a certain seat and is rewarded with a piece of meat and by rubbing it between the ears. When every cat knows his perch, he automatically goes to it when he comes out of the chute.

Terrell, who celebrated his 74th birthday on September 2, was born and reared on what is known as the Kit Jackson farm on Panther Creek in Daviess County. The farm was then owned by his grandfather. When Zack was 10 years old, his parents moved to Owensboro and he grew up in a house located at Fifth and Lewis streets.

Young Zack attended the Third Street school, but the circus was in his blood and, in his early twenties he left home to take a job with the John Robinson circus in the spring of 1904, selling peanuts and popcorn. That circus, along with Hagenbeck-Wallace, was owned by a trio of veteran circus men, Ed Ballard, Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers, and they liked young Zack's hustle and enterprise.

In 1912, Mugivan gave Zack a job with "Hawes Great London" show which he also owned. The show wasn't doing well and was reorganized into an 11-car show under the name of "Sanger's Greater European Circus." Young Zack was assigned to manage it with a contract calling for 10 per cent of the gross or a flat \$3,000 a season.

Paint Job

He took charge of the circus in November, 1913, at Americus, Ga., and soon the Terrell flair for showmanship began to assert itself. He didn't like the name "Sanger's," so he hired two painters and overnight they painted out the name on every car in the train. When it pulled out the next morning, it was "The Famous Robinson Circus."

The name Robinson was magic in the south at that time and by the time the circus pulled into winter quarters at Montgomery, Ala., it had made \$89,000 and young Zack Terrell had about \$10,000 to his credit for two months' work.

Not content with this exploit, Terrell then tried to sign up Harry K. Thaw, the millionaire who had just escaped from a New York insane asylum after shooting the architect, Stanford White, in a noted triangle love affair of that period.

Needless to say, this bit of showmanship did not go unnoticed and by way of getting him out of competition, the John Robinson circus signed Zack up the next fall as assistant manager. He continued with that show until 1919.

In 1921, the trio of Ballard, Mugivan and Bowers, which had given Zack his start in show business, purchased the Sells-Floto circus from the Denver Post for \$219,000 and offered Zack 25 per cent of it.

"I went to Owensboro and drew every cent I had out of the bank and became part owner of my first circus," Zack recalled.

The circus paid for itself the first year and everyone got their money back. Thus encouraged, the new partners really branched out. That fall, they formed a new corporation called the American Circus Corporation. Into it they incorporated five circuses, Hagenbeck-Wallace, John Robinson, Sells-Floto and two new ones which they purchased, Sparks Circus and Al G. Barnes. Zack was given a 25 per cent interest in the new organization.



Recalls Circus Days – Zack Terrell, former owner of Cole Brothers circus, now lived the life of a gentleman farmer near Owensboro after 45 years in the circus business. He is shown as he sits on the lawn of his home on Leitchfield Road, reading a program of the Sells Floto circus which he once managed. Mrs. Terrell and two of his prize pointer dogs are shown with him. In the background is a two-acre lake that is part of the 175-acre Terrell farm. Terrell, a native of Daviess County, retired from circus ownership in 1948 when he sold Cole Brothers and came to Owensboro to live.

Signed Tom Mix

In 1929, Zack was named manager of Sells-Floto and his star attraction was Tom Mix, the movie cowboy, then as popular as Hopsalong Cassidy is now. Mix was paid \$10,000 a week and traveled in his own private car. His horses, "Tony" and "Buster" rode with him in one half of a stock car. Mix was a big hit with the kids and the circus played to capacity crowds.

The other partners thought Mix was being paid a lot of money, but Ed Ballard told them: "Tom Mix is one reason that John Ringling will buy out the American Circus Corporation some day."

Ballard's prophecy proved to be right. A few years later, Ringling Brothers paid the partners \$2,000,000 for their five circuses and took them all off the road.

But Zack Terrell wasn't out of show business long. In 1933, he had charge of all the wild animal acts at the Chicago World's Fair and Clyde Beatty was his trainer.

"When the fair was over, we had a lot of animals on our hands, so Clyde and I, along with Jess Atkins, decided to form our own circus. I bought the title of Cole Brothers, which was the name of a small circus in Canada, and we were in business."

It was also at Chicago that Zack met a pretty circus performer from Mt. Clemens, Mich., named Estrella Nelson. She is now Mrs. Zack Terrell.

Although out of show business now, the Terrells' love for animals is still very much in evidence. On their farm, they breed a few thoroughbred horses and Shetland ponies. One of their home-bred colts, 3-year-old "Rushing Tide," started at Dade Park recently but injured himself coming out of the starting gate. They also keep a few saddle horses that are holdovers from their circus days.

And, of course, the circus wagons, which Zack says make very useful chicken coops.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 25 April 1954, p.1D:



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 6 August 1954, p.1A:

**Zack Terrell, Retired Owner
Of Cole Brothers Circus, Dies**



Zachariah Terrell (Zach) Terrell, 75, a leading figure in the circus world for half a century, died of a heart attack at 5:30 a. m., Thursday at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

He had been in ill health for several years and had been at the clinic for about a week.

Terrell had retired from show business in 1948, moving to a stately old homestead on the Leitchfield Road after selling the Cole Brothers Circus for \$350,000.

A native of Daviess County, he was reared on what is known as the Kit Jackson farm on Panther Creek. He was attracted to circus life as a youth and in 1904 took his first job in the entertainment world selling popcorn and peanuts for the John Robinson Circus, which at that time was playing in Cincinnati.

Terrell moved up quickly and in 1912 was given the job of managing Sanger's Greater European Circus, a show which was struggling to keep on its feet. He took charge in November, 1913, at Americus, Ga. One of his first acts was to change the name of the circus from Sanger's to "The Famous Robinson Circus." The name Robinson was magic in the South at that time and the show moved into the black almost overnight.

He moved from there to the John Robinson Circus. In 1921, he took over one-fourth interest in the Sells-Floto Circus and later a quarter-interest in the American Circus Corporation, which included Sells-Floto, Hagenback-Wallace, Sparks, Al G. Barnes, and the circus of his first employment John Robinson.

In 1929, as manager of Sells-Floto, he signed Tom Mix for \$10,000.00 a week to star in the circus. With this star attraction, the show became a big hit and played to capacity crowds. Eventually, because it was providing such strong competition to "Ringling Brothers Circus" the latter organization bought out the five circuses for \$200,000 and took them all off the road.

Terrell moved back into show business in 1933 by taking charge of a wild animal act at the Chicago World's Fair. The trainer at the fair was Clyde Beatty.

It was at Chicago that Terrell met Estrella Nelson, a member of the famous Nelson Family, an acrobatic troupe, who worked the elephants for the show at the fair. By the end of the show they were married.

When the fair was over, Terrell, Beatty, and Jess Atkins bought the title of the Cole Brothers Circus and using the animals from the fair, formed their own circus.

The circus, which became famous under them, toured the country for many years, and kept its winter headquarters at Louisville for most of the time.

After selling the circus, he and Mrs. Terrell stayed with it until it made its first performance of the new season in Owensboro. The next day the circus moved on to Evansville without them.

As a youth, Terrell attended public schools in Owensboro. He was a member of the Masons, Elks, Eagles, and knights of Pythias.

He is survived by his wife and several cousins.

The body will arrive in Evansville this morning and will be brought to the Delbert J. Glenn Funeral Home here. Funeral services will be held Monday.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 6 August 1954, p.4A:

Editorial and Other Comment
ZACK TAUGHT A GOOD LESSON IN LIFE

One of Owensboro's most colorful citizens died Wednesday. The name of Zack Terrell was to us as magic as that of Barnum, whose ability to discover and organize an everyday philosophy made him memorable in American history. But Zack was much more to those who knew him than a reminder of the gay, glamorous and entertaining era of the big tops. As the Owensboro showman grew, his character kept pace, and his years mellowed him, bringing him closer to his friends at home.

Zack loved life not for the moment he was given to play a role of one of the greatest men in show business, but rather for the companionship of those around him. You didn't have to be close to Zack to appreciate his uniqueness.

The Owensboro showman was a humble person with a gift for discovering outstanding personalities and meeting them on their level. This trait kept boredom from his life. He enjoyed everyone and everyone enjoyed Zack. Zack's rise to fame was not over smooth paths, which makes his character an even more cherished memory. He achieved financial success the hard way. From playing circus in childhood, to his first thrilling job of selling peanuts under a real "big top," Zack traveled 750,000 miles, owned or had an interest in or was some way connected with every major circus in America, suffered fires, train wrecks, elephant stampedes, attachments and even bankruptcy.

Zack's trials and tribulations in his early life brought him scars which would have caused many to become embittered against the world. But Zack ruled his energies and directed them toward a star he discovered as a lad. The circus to Zack was like sustaining food. The show was people and their talents furnishing enjoyment for other people. He loved the frills and those attributes that make a master showman, or he would have never climbed to the heights he attained, but there was much more to Zack.

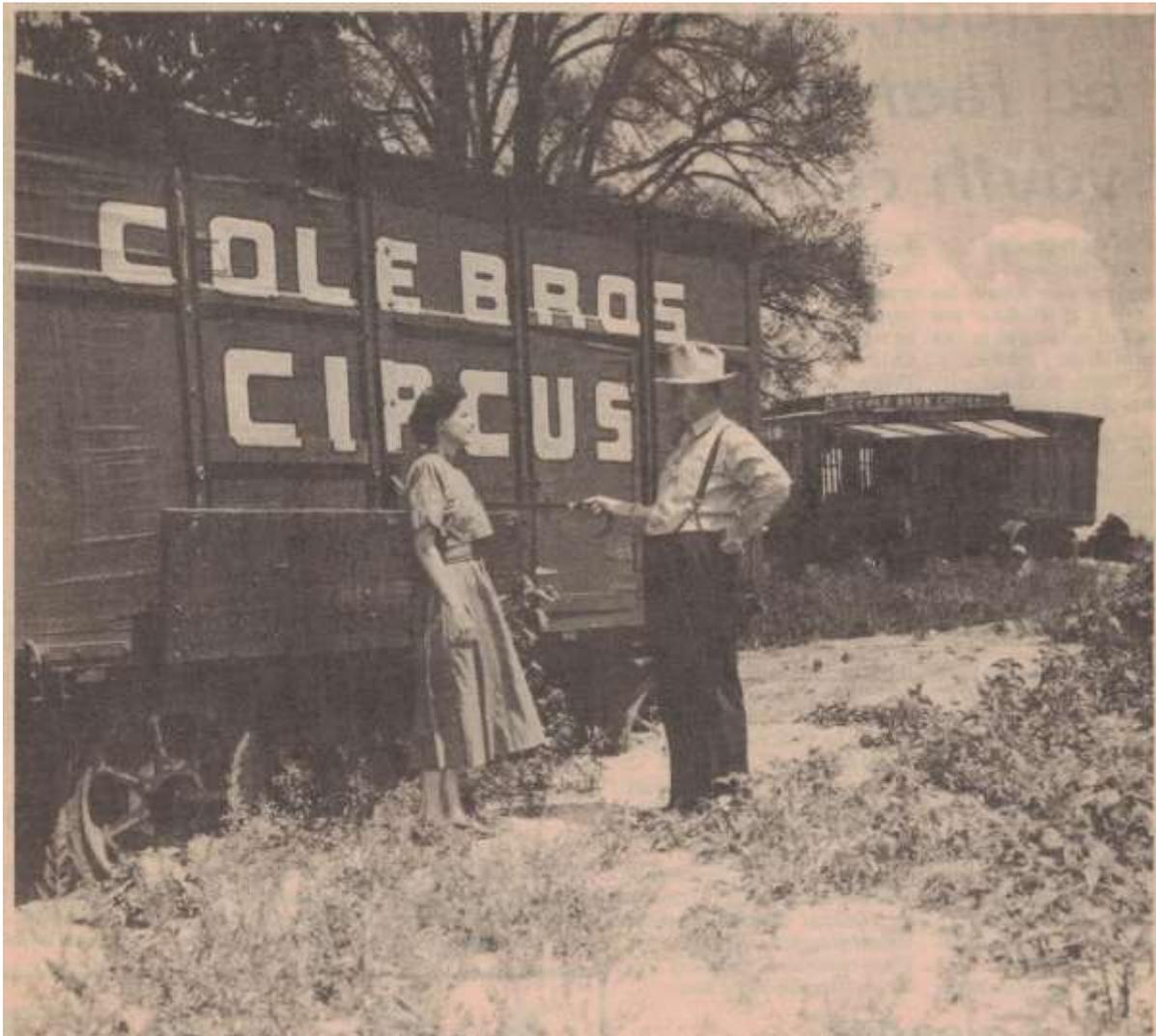
The showman was undoubtedly hurt to see the big top era fade from the fast moving American scene, yet he understood the transition because he understood the people who caused it. Like his ups and downs in show business, he took the change in his stride, retiring from his life's role in 1948.

At 75, Zack still held the spark of youth, that fondness for new situations. A heart condition held him back, but he never permitted his tormentor to dominate him. He fought to the end to keep his freshness and enthusiasm for life, and certainly he did not fall short of this goal.

We will miss Zack, but cherish having known him. In our times of disappointment and rough going, Zack will come back to show us the way to forget ourselves through fellowship with other people. It is hard to find an answer without an example. For this reason we will always be grateful to this master showman.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 17 June 1976, p.1C:



IN 1903, Zack Terrell left a farm in Daviess County to join a circus in Cincinnati selling concessions. In 1948, he retired from the circus and came back to live on a Daviess County farm. At that time he was owner of Cole Brothers Circus

which he sold for a reported \$350,000. But he kept some of his old circus wagons around the farm to remind him of the old days. In this 1949 photograph, Terrell and his wife, the former Estrella Nelson, look over the old wagons.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 17 September 1978, p.2C:



This was one of the last meetings of two legendary circus men — Zack Terrell and Clyde Beatty. On Sept. 13, 1953, prior to playing a show here, Beatty, right, and his general manager Frank Orman, left, paid a visit to Terrell at his home on Leitchfield Road. Terrell was one of the founders of the Cole Bros. Circus. Orman had been his manager and Beatty was the animal trainer in the early days of the show. Later Beatty went out on his own and started his own circus. The Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, which ends a four-day stand in Owensboro today, is a successor to the two circuses. Beatty is holding a tusk from a Cole Bros. elephant which went berserk and had to be destroyed a few years earlier. Terrell died a year after this picture was taken. Beatty died in 1965.

—Messenger-Inquirer file photo



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 11 March 1994, p2B:

Estrella Terrell Sims 87, of 2412 E. Parrish Ave., Owensboro, died Wednesday, March 9, 1994 at Owensboro-Daviess County Hospital. She was born in MT. Clemens, Mich, and was a member of Trinity Episcopal Church and the Owensboro County Club. Mrs. Sims was one of seven children who performed with their parents as the Nelson Family acrobats from 1911-1922. The act performed with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, Wirth's Circus and the John Robinson Circus in the United States and Australia. They also performed with the Tingling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. She a sister and brother were featured in the Standard Oil Company Circus at the Chicago World's Fair in 1934. The circus was managed by the late Zack Terrell, whom she later married. She was the daughter of the late Arthur and Sarah Warren Nelson, and was preceded in death by four sisters, Oneida Nelson, Rosina Brown, Carmencita Nelson and Hilda Burkhardt. She also was preceded in death by her first husband, Zach Terrell, who was well known in Owensboro as owner of Cole Brother's Circus, who died in 1954; and by her second husband, Virgil O. Sims, who died in 1976.

Survivors include a brother, Paul Nelson of Owensboro; a sister, Theol Marlowe of Sarasota, Fla; and three nieces, Sally Ann Gillett of MT. Clemens, Mich., Sally Marlowe of Sarasota, Fla, and Mary Lou Mader of Long Island, N. Y.

Private family services and burial will be held. There will be no visitation. A memorial service will be held at a later date. Glenn Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements. The family requests that expressions of sympathy take the form of donations to either the Trinity Episcopal Church, 720 Ford Avenue, Owensboro, Ky. 42301 or to the charity of the donor's choice.

Memorial contribution envelopes are available at Glenn Funeral Home. Source: Owensboro Messenger Newspaper, Owensboro, Daviess CO., KY.

[Note: Estrella was born March 13, 1906. She is buried in a vault under Zach Terrell at the Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, Kentucky.]



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 20 October 2002, p.3E:

MASTER OF THE BIG TOP **Zachariah Terrell found his calling in the circus**

By Glenn Hodges, Messenger-Inquirer

A story in a February 1941 edition of the Louisville Courier-Journal told the tale of how Zachariah Terrell's love for the circus was born.

It was said that one day when Zack was a boy, he couldn't take his eyes off the side of his father's barn as a clown with a big red nose pasted strips of a poster on the farm building on the outskirts of Owensboro.

Each strip that was slapped on the barn by the brush exploded into a mass of glorious color and spelled out the message that the John Robinson Circus was coming to town.

The poster showed bareback riders risking their necks as their horses galloped around a circus ring. Zack just stood and stared, fantasizing and envisioning himself performing the same daring stunt.

One day soon thereafter, Zack is said to even have climbed on the back of his pony Snowball and tried to duplicate the feats he saw on the poster. Round and round, he would ride. Zack had found his dream in life.

In 1904, at the age of 25, Terrell left the family farm along Panther Creek and traveled to Cincinnati where he joined the John Robinson Circus, taking his first show business job selling peanuts and popcorn.

During his next 43 eventful years, Terrell became a major leader in the circus world. He traveled more than 750,000 miles, owned or had interest in almost every major circus in the United States, suffered through fires, train wrecks, elephant stampedes, World War II and was even struck by lightning.

Terrell would achieve financial success the hard way, never riding a smooth path to fame. Twice he went broke in the circus business, and twice he bounced back.

As Terrell grew as a public figure, his character kept pace and the years mellowed him, drawing him closer to his friends at home.

"The name of Zack Terrell was to us as magic as that of Barnum," the Messenger-Inquirer would write about the local master of the Big Top.

Within his first 10 years in the circus business, Terrell made his move up the ladder, becoming manager of Sanger's Greater European Shows in 1912. That show, which was very popular in the South, was struggling to stay on its feet.

Terrell knew the name of Robinson was magic among circus crowds in Dixie at that time, and he decided to make a change. After a performance in Americus, Ga., in November 1913, Terrell's show took on a new name. It became "the Famous Robinson Circus." That night after the last show, painters quickly covered over the long Sanger name on the wagons, cages and trunks.

With the new name emblazoned on everything the circus had, it took to the road again throughout the South. People came on foot, on mule and horseback, in buggies and by steamboats and trains. With the name change, Terrell's circus moved into the black on its ledgers almost overnight.

In 1921, he took over a fourth interest in the Sells-Floto Circus and later a quarter interest in the American Circus Corp. which included Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sparks, Al G. Barnes and Terrell's first employer, the John Robinson Circus. All these circuses were playing "big time" shows in New York, Boston, Chicago and throughout the United States.

By 1929, as manager of the Sells-Floto Circus, Terrell was giving his circus audiences everything they wanted - elephants, tigers, lions, clowns, acrobats and trapeze artists. But he felt he needed one more big attraction to make the extravaganza complete. Terrell found it when he signed Tom Mix, the famed cowboy film star of the early 1900s, for 10 weeks of shows, paying him the whopping sum of \$10,000 per week. Mix dazzled the capacity crowds with an expert rifle shooting exhibition.

By then, the five circuses with which Terrell was involved had become so successful and provided so much competition to the famous Ringling Brothers Circus that the latter bought all five for \$2 million and took them all off the road.

Terrell returned to show business in 1933, taking charge of the wild animal act at the Chicago World's Fair. He enlisted lion tamer Clyde Beatty as his trainer.

It was in Chicago that Terrell met Estrella Nelson, a member of the Famous Nelson Family, an acrobatic troupe. By the end of the shows, Zack and Estrella were married.

After the World's Fair, Terrell, Beatty and a partner, Jess Atkins, bought the title of Cole Brothers Circus and, using the animals from the fair, formed their own circus.

In May 1936, after three weeks of shows at the Chicago Stadium, Terrell returned triumphantly to Owensboro where the Cole Brothers-Clyde Beatty Circus staged two performances. Beatty's act was the featured attraction, but the show also included the Great Gretonas, the Flying Harolds, the Imperial Illingtons, a lion and tiger riding on an elephant's back, five herds of elephants, more than 200 ponies and thoroughbred horses, and Goliath, the biggest hippopotamus in America.

After six months in operation, the Cole Brothers-Clyde Beatty Circus was ranked as the second largest in America. Only the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey was bigger.

As time passed, Terrell obtained sole ownership of the show, which became known as the Cole Brothers Circus. From 1940 to 1943, during World War II, the only two railroad circuses in the United States were Cole Brothers and Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey.

Touring the country during those war years was hard for shows like Cole Brothers. The circus played a valuable role in boosting civilian morale here at home but struggled under difficult labor conditions.

At one time during the 1941 season, Terrell had a shortage of 275 workers. Sixty people moved the big tent in a job that usually took 180. Performers pitched in and took their place at the ropes.

Moreover, Terrell's circus had trouble meeting schedules because of rail traffic snarls, but only one matinee was canceled because of a late arrival and just one performance date was lost. Once in 1942, Terrell was so frustrated and determined that he vowed the show would be on the road if he had to load the whole circus on the backs of his elephants and personally lead them around the United States.

It was also during World War II that Terrell experienced one of the saddest, most disturbing accidents of his circus career.

In 1942 Terrell was given ownership of Old Pitt, the last of the John Robinson Circus elephant herd. John Robinson IV presented the 101-year-old elephant to Terrell's wife Estrella as a gift.

Old Pitt had been part of the Robinson Circus act called "The Military Elephants" that became famous during Terrell's early days in the circus business. During the peak years of their performances, the elephants - Pitt, Tony and Clara - lumbered about in military garb and would maneuver and fire cannons. One would fall wounded, and Tillie, an elephant wearing a Red Cross nurse's cap, would dash to its aid. By the start of the war, only Old Pitt survived.

In August 1943, Terrell took Old Pitt on the road as the circus traveled across Montana on a series of one-night performances. In Dillon, Mont., on Aug. 6, 1943, Terrell was tending the elephants as the animals huddled together at the fairgrounds during a severe thunderstorm. When a lightning bolt hit Terrell and the herd, Old Pitt was knocked down and killed instantly. The other elephants and Terrell were stunned, but they recovered.

In 1944, there were three railroad circuses in America. In 1945 that number increased to six, but in 1947 it dropped to five.

In the years immediately after the war, Terrell was in his late 60s, slowing down and seeing up close that the Big Top era was beginning to fade from the American scene. He sold the Cole Brothers Circus for a reported \$350,000 in 1948 and retired from show business.

After the circus sale, Terrell and his wife stayed with the show until it finished its first performance of the season in Owensboro. When the circus went back on the road the next day to Evansville, the Terrells remained in Owensboro and moved into a stately home on Leitchfield Road near the present bypass.

On Aug. 5, 1954, Zack Terrell suffered a heart attack at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., and died at the age of 75. His widow continued to live at their new home in Daviess County. Estrella and her acrobat family were named to the Circus Hall of Fame in 1969, and she died here in 1994.

After his death, Terrell was depicted by the Messenger-Inquirer as a "humble man" with "a gift for discovering outstanding personalities and meeting them on their level."

"This trait kept boredom from his life," the newspaper declared. "He enjoyed everyone, and everyone enjoyed Zack."

The newspaper added: "Zack loved life not for the moment he was given to play a role as one of the greatest men in show business, but rather for the companionship of those around him. You didn't have to be close to Zack to appreciate his uniqueness.

"Zack's trials and tribulations in his early life brought him scars which would have caused many to become embittered against the world, but Zack ruled his energies and directed them toward a star he discovered as a lad. The circus to Zack was like sustaining food.

"We will miss Zack, but cherish having known him," the editorialist finally noted. "In our times of disappointment and rough going, Zack will come back to show us the way to forget ourselves through fellowship with other people. It is hard to find an answer without an example. For this reason, we will always be grateful to this master showman."

On the night of Nov. 27, 1999, at an Owensboro Tourist Commission ceremony at the Owensboro Sportscenter, Zack Terrell and 37 other distinguished people from Owensboro and the surrounding area were inducted into the "Hometown Heroes Hall of Fame." Terrell's photograph is on display at the Visitor Information Center/Tourist Commission Office on East Second Street in downtown Owensboro.



Zachariah and Estrella Terrell's mausoleum sits near the entrance of Elmwood Cemetery near Old Hartford Road. Terrell, who grew up along Panther Creek, was a major leader in the circus world. Two other pictures were included in article; they contained captions – “Above: Zack Terrell is shown in this photo displayed at the Owensboro-Daviess County Tourism Commission Hometown Hall of Fame. Terrell was inducted into the hall with 37 others Nov. 27, 1999.” And “Zack Terrell, left, signed cowboy film star Tom Mix, right, for 10 weeks of shows in 1929, paying him \$10,000 per week.”



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY. 15 August 2007, Community section, p.2:



Photo submitted by Davvy Self

Dr. H.B. Harris, right, is pictured around 1937 on Allen Street with the calliope he played in the Owensboro Christmas parade for more than 30 years. Also pictured, from left, are Zach Terrell and James White. Terrell was the original circus owner of the calliope and sold it to Harris. White, an OMU employee, helped Harris restore it.



Zack Terrell – picture on right was made on 19 April 1946 in Louisville, KY.



Zack Terrell and show nurse.



Zack Terrell (on right) & Jess Adkins



Zack Terrell's parents, James Robert Terrell & Corilla Alverda Johnson, were married in Ohio County, KY on 31 October 1878. Zachariah is listed in their home in the 1880 and 1900 censuses of Daviess County, KY; in 1880 they were residing in the Crane Pond neighborhood and in 1900 at 619 Main Street in Owensboro. In 1889 the family moved from the county to Owensboro.

James R. Terrell ("Pig") was born 22 September 1856 at Pleasant Ridge in Daviess County, KY and died on 18 February 1915 in Owensboro. His wife, Corilla Alverda Johnson, the daughter of Thomas L. Johnson & Margaret A. Murray, was born 3 January 1859 in Ohio County, KY and died on 26 April 1937 on the Jesse Johnson farm near Owensboro. James & Alverda had four children – Zachariah T., Martine ('Jim Baby', 1888-1913, wife of A. F. Maloney), Gerda Bell ('Gertie', 1883-1890, died of consumption) and an infant that died in infancy.



Gravestones in Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY

Zack Terrell's grandparents, John Lynch Terrell (1825-1887) and Isabell Sparks (1838-1922), were married on 8 November 1855 in Jefferson County, KY. John L. was the son of Zachariah Terrell (1779-1861) & Polly Floyd (1792-1848); see entry for Zachariah on Findagrave.com. John L. Terrell is listed in the 1850 census of Spencer County, KY and the 1860, 1870 and 1880 censuses of Daviess County, KY. John L. & Isabell had six children – James Robert, Laura B. (Jackson), William H. and Lona (Monarch) and two others died in childhood. A bible record of their family was published in the periodical, Kentucky Family Records, Vol. XI (West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association, Owensboro, KY, 1985, pp.78-79). John L. & Isabell Terrell were buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Owensboro.



Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY

Zack Terrell at the time of the 1900 census was operating a saloon with his uncle, Allen Johnson, in Owensboro. In 1904 Zack married Zelmerta Myrtle Westerfield; their marriage license was recorded in Taylor County, West Virginia. Myrtle, daughter of John Franklin Westerfield and Sarah Alice Burks, was born 28 August 1877 Daviess County, KY. Myrtle and Zack Terrell are listed together in the 1910 census of Covington, Kenton County, KY and 1920 census of Peru, Miami County, IN. Myrtle was adjudged to be insane in 1934. Zack Terrell was granted a divorce from Myrtle in 1935; she had left him in 1928. In their divorce suit he agreed to pay her \$50 a month support for life. The 1940 census of Daviess County, KY, lists Myrtle Terrell as living on the Leitchfield Road (Highway 54) and reported her as being widowed. She was enumerated only four households from the residence of Jesse Johnson, the uncle of her former husband. Myrtle Westerfield Terrell died on 9 January 1948 in Owensboro, KY, where she was buried in Elmwood Cemetery. She had no children.

In the 1910 census of Covington, KY Zack Terrell's occupation was recorded as circus showman. On his registration for the World War I draft in 1918 Zachariah Terrell reported that he was an employee – assistant manager of the John Robinson Circus, was a resident of R.F.D. Route 2 Owensboro. A description on his registration stated his eyes & hair were brown and his height & build were medium.

REGISTRATION CARD

1. NAME: **Zachariah Terrell**

2. PERMANENT HOME ADDRESS: **R. F. D. 2 Owensboro Ky**

3. Age in Years: **39** Date of Birth: **Sept 2 1879**

4. RACE: **X** (White)

5. U. S. CITIZEN: **X** (Native Born)

6. PRESENT OCCUPATION: **Employee Asst. Manager** EMPLOYER'S NAME: **John Robinson Circus**

7. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS: **R. F. D. 2 Owensboro Ky**

8. NEAREST RELATIVE: **Mrs. Zach Terrell (Wife) Owensboro, Ky**

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE
 P. M. G. O. Foreign No. 1 (1918)
Zachariah Terrell (Signature of Registrant)

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

10-7-18 Daviess Co

DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT

HEIGHT			BUILD			COLOR OF EYES	COLOR OF HAIR
Tall	Medium	Short	Slender	Medium	Stout		
21	22 X	23	24	25 X	26	Brown	28 Brown

29. Has person lost arm, leg, hand, eye, or is he obviously physically disqualified? (Specify.)
No

30. I certify that my answers are true; that the person registered has read or has had read to him his own answers; that I have witnessed his signature or marks, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

J. M. [Signature]
 (Signature of Registrar)

Date of Registration: **Sept. 6, 1918**
 Local Board **Henry Co. Tenn.**
Paris, Tenn.

Local Board for the County of **Daviess**,
 State of **Kentucky**
Owensboro, Ky.
 (STAMP OF LOCAL BOARD)

(The stamp of the Local Board having jurisdiction of the area in which the registrant has his permanent home shall be placed in this box.) P3-671 (OVER)

World War I Draft Registration card

The 1918 Owensboro, KY city directory lists Zack & Myrtle Terrell as being residents at 2410 Leitchfield Road. The 1920 census reported he was a resident of Peru, IN and gave his occupation as circus actor. Zack Terrell could not be located in the 1930 and 1940 federal censuses; he was possibly then on the road to another circus engagement. Zack Terrell on 2 April 1946 bought the farm in Daviess County, KY of his late uncle, Jesse R. Johnson (1862-1946), The farm was on the southside of the Leitchfield Road about one-half mile southeast of Owensboro.

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 24 March 1946, p.3A:

PUBLIC SALE
160 Acre Farm, More or Less
About ½ mile from the city of Owensboro on Leitchfield road, belonging to the late Jesse R. Johnson, sold to settle estate.
Sale to be on the premises at 10 a. m. April 2, 1946
Terms made known day of sale. For information call 680.
HARRY BOTTORF, Administrator With Will Annexed

Zack Terrell was the highest bidder at the estate sale on the farm. He paid \$40,500 for the 160-acre farm. He had been a frequent visitor to the farm during the forty years his uncle had owned it. Another frequent visitor had been Raymond (“Ray”) Johnson Chapman (1891-1920); a first cousin of Terrell, who is the only major league baseball player to be killed by a pitched ball during a game. At the time of the 1920 and 1930 censuses Zack’s mother, Alverda Johnson Terrell, was living with her brother, Jesse Johnson, on the farm and she died at the residence there on 26 April 1937.

Jesse R. Johnson, a bachelor, died at his home on the Leitchfield Road on 28 February 1946. He had purchased his farm in 1905 from John Henry Nave.

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 2 June 1905, p.2:

BRINGS \$17,000.
Jesse Johnson Buys Nave Farm On the Leitchfield Road.
Jesse R. Johnson has bought the farm on the Leitchfield road belonging to John Nave. The price paid was \$17,000. The tract contains 160 acres and is in a high state of cultivation. In addition to this the improvements are attractive and valuable.

The 160-acre farm had been purchased by John H. Nave in 1899 from Thomas S. Pettit. Pettit, former editor of the newspaper, Owensboro Monitor, and a prominent politician, had resided on the farm since 1895 when he had bought the property from R. G. Hill. Hill had acquired the farm from Lynch Gray in 1889. Prior to Gray the farm had belonged to Frank Hall. Lynch Gray is shown as the owner of the property (then 236 acres) on the following plat map from the 1876 An Illustrated Historical Atlas Map of Daviess County, KY (Leo McDonough & Co., Uppertown Precinct, p.38):



Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY

Articles in the Owensboro, KY Newspapers About Zack Terrell
Abstracted by Jerry Long

(In addition to this list there were numerous additional references to him in the Owensboro newspapers. His name appeared under four spelling variations – Zack Terrell, Zach Terrell, Zack Terrill & Zach Terrill. Notices about Zack Terrell were published in many other newspapers throughout the U.S. from coast to coast.)

- Owensboro Inquirer – 1898: 24 April, p.1 (soldier - enlists in Company H, 3rd Regiment of the Kentucky National Guard for service in the Spanish American War)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1922: 10 May, p.6 (“Praise is Given to Manager Zack Terrill”)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1923: 16 July, p.2 (“‘Snowball’ Lives Again As Zack’s Dreams Come True”)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1924: 8 September, p.10 (“Zach is Camera-Shy, But Admits His Show’s the Best”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1925: 22 February, p.1B (“Part Owner of Second Largest Circus Began With Coffee Sack ‘Top’”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1927: 19 June, pp.1 & 12 (his ancestral history is told by Worcester, MA newspaper, born in Ohio County, son of J. R. Terrell)

- Owensboro Inquirer – 1928: 26 August, p.1B (“When Zach’s Elephant Ran Wild”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1928: 13 December, p.5 (acquires the Sparks circus)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1928: 23 September, p.1B (“Zack Terrill, Guest of Prince George On Ship”)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1930: 14 August, p.7 (“Zack Terrell Develops One Of World’s Largest Shows”, picture with Tom Mix)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1930: 16 August, p.3 (“Tom Mix, Tony, Zack, Judge Arthur Draw Two Big Circus Crowds To City”)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1932: 11 September, p.1B (“Zack Terrell Has Been Circus Head Twelve Years”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1935: 4 April, p.1A (granted a divorce in Chicago, IL from his wife, Myrtle, they were married in 1904 and she left him in 1928)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1935: 12 May, p.1 (married Miss Estrella Nelson in Chicago, IL on 22 April 1935, she is an acrobat & elephant trainer, he recently was granted a divorce from his former wife)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1935: 24 July, p.12 (to bring his own circus to Owensboro at early date)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1936: 29 March, p.5A (visits Owensboro relatives)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1936: 10 May, p.1B (returns here as owner-manager of circus)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1938: 30 July, p.1 (“Comes Home Head of 'Biggest Circus In World'”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1938: 31 July, p.4A (“King in Circusland”)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1940: 10 May, p.5 (“Mr. and Mrs. Zach Terrill Guests at Luncheon Today” at Rudd Hotel in Owensboro)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1940: 10 May, p.9 (“Circus Here For 2 Performances”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1940: 11 May, p. 3 (Owensboro luncheon)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1940: 29 September, p.2A (“State Fair Grounds To Be Winter Quarters of Cole Brothers Circus”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1941: 29 April, p.8 (brings circus here)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1942: 5 April, p.6A (“Zach Terrill, Owensboro Circus King, Bringing Big Show Home”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1942: 29 November, p.5B (his show will continue throughout war)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1943: 25 April, pp.1B & 2B (the circus is coming)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1943: 17 October, p.2B (“Zack Terrell Sees Day When Circus Will Move By Air”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1945 : 12 April, p.5 (his Cole Brothers Circus coming here April 23)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1946: 31 March, p.1 (“Has Greatest Show in History”, picture of Zack Terrell; this picture of Zack Terrell with cane in front of circus wagon is mistakenly identified as circus man, C. C. Groscuth, in the book, "A History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky", Hugh O. Potter, 1974, p.220)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1946: 3 April, p.4 (purchases farm of uncle, Jess Johnson, on Leitchfield Road)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1948: 20 April, p.3 (circus enjoyed by large audiences)

- Owensboro Messenger – 1948: 26 December, p.1A (sells the Cole Brothers Circus for \$350,000)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1948: 30 December, p.8 (to be Daviess County farmer)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1949: 1 April, p.2 (“The Circus Zack Terrill Built, Cole Bros., Shows Here April 18”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1949: 11 August, p.1 (“Zack Terrell is Honored as Owensboro’s ‘Great Showman’”)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1949: 14 August, p.1B (“Circus Executive, Back Home To Stay, ‘Wouldn’t Trade Places With Anybody’”, by John Hager & John Potter)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1949: 14 August, p.8B (finds contentment back home on farm)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1952: 20 March, p.8 (Cole Brothers Circus discontinues railroad tours)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1953: 13 September, p.2D (by Jimmy Jones; says that Beatty was top showman of the circus world)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1953: 6 December, p.15D (Zack Terrill owners of Pennyrile Trailer Court on Leitchfield Road)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1953: 13 December, p.8A (“Famous (Nelson’s)” hold reunion)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1954: 25 April, p.1D (picture of his farm on Leitchfield Road)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1954: 6 August, p.1A (leading figure in the circus world for half a century, died of a heart attack Thursday at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, he had been at the clinic for about a week, retired from show business in 1948, moving to a stately old homestead on the Leitchfield Road after selling the Cole Brothers Circus for \$350,000, reared on what is known as the Kit Jackson farm on Panther Creek, he was attracted to circus life as a youth and in 1904 took his first job in the entertainment world selling popcorn & peanuts for the John Robinson Circus, which at that time was playing in Cincinnati, moved up quickly & in 1912 was given the job of managing Sanger's Greater European Circus, a show which was struggling to keep in its feet, took charge in November 1913 at Americus, GA one of his first acts was to change the name of the circus from Sanger's to "The Famous Robinson Circus" the name Robinson was magic in the South at that time and the show moved into the black almost overnight, he moved from there to the John Robinson Circus, in 1921, took over one-fourth interest in the Sells-Floto Circus & later a quarter-interest in the American Circus Corporation, which included Sells-Floto, Hagenback-Wallace, Sparks, Al. G. Barnes, and the circus of his first employment John Robinson, in 1929, as manager of Sells-Floto, he signed Tom Mix for \$10,000.00 a week to star in the circus, with this star attraction, the show became a big hit & played to capacity crowds, eventually because it was providing such strong competition to "Ringling Brothers Circus the latter organization bought out the five circuses for \$200,000 and took them all off the road, moved back into show business in 1933 by taking charge of a wild animal act at the Chicago Worlds Fair, when the fair was over, Terrell, Beatty, and Jess Atkins bought the title of the Cole Brothers Circus and using the animals from the fair, formed their own circus, the circus, which became famous under them, toured the country for many years, & kept its winter headquarters at Louisville for most of the time, after selling the circus, he stayed with it until it made its first performance of the new season in Owensboro, the next day the circus moved on to Evansville without them)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1954: 7 August, p.4A (Editorial - "Zack Taught A Good Lesson In Life")

- Owensboro Messenger – 1954: 26 August, p.1 (“\$400,000 Estate Is Left By Former Circus Owner, by Zack Terrell, To His Wife”)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1956: 22 July, p.2D (Mrs. Terrell predicts circus will make a comeback)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1969: 7 January, p.1B (Estrella Nelson Terrell Sims of Owensboro named a member of the Circus Hall of Fame on Monday, member of famous Nelson acrobatic troupe)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1976: 15 June, p.1C (“Sawdust trail: ‘Famous Nelsons,’ Kate Hanneford hold reunion”, by Keith Lawrence)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1976: 17 June, p.1C (“Terrell's career spanned 44 years”, by Keith Lawrence, pictures of him & Cole Brothers Circus)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1978: 10 September, p.9A (“Circus time: And a local man helped get it all started”, by Keith Lawrence)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1978: 17 September, p.2C (picture of Zack Terrell and Clyde Beatty)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1994: 11 March, p.2B (widow of Zack Terrell, Estrella Terrell Sims, died 9 March 1994)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1999: 28 November, pp.1A & 2A (inducted into the Owensboro-Daviess County Tourist Commission Hall of Fame on 27 November 1999)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2002: 20 October, p.3E (“Master of the Big Top”, by Glenn Hodges; a story in a February 1941 edition of the Louisville Courier-Journal told the tale of how Zachariah Terrell's love for the circus was born; in 1904, at the age of 25, Terrell left the family farm along Panther Creek and traveled to Cincinnati where he joined the John Robinson Circus, taking his first show business job selling peanuts and popcorn; during his next 43 eventful years, he became a major leader in the circus world; he traveled more than 750,000 miles, owned or had interest in almost every major circus in the United States, suffered through fires, train wrecks, elephant stampedes, World War II and was even struck by lightning; he would achieve financial success the hard way, never riding a smooth path to fame, twice he went broke in the circus business, and twice he bounced back; he sold the Cole Brothers Circus for a reported \$350,000 in 1948 and retired from show business; after the circus sale, Terrell and his wife stayed with the show until it finished its first performance of the season in Owensboro, when the circus went back on the road the next day to Evansville, the Terrells remained in Owensboro and moved into a stately home on Leitchfield Road near the present bypass; on Aug. 5, 1954, Zack Terrell suffered a heart attack at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., and died at the age of 75; his widow continued to live at their new home in Daviess County. Estrella and her acrobat family were named to the Circus Hall of Fame in 1969, and she died here in 1994; the newspaper added: "Zack loved life not for the moment he was given to play a role as one of the greatest men in show business, on the night of Nov. 27, 1999, at an Owensboro Tourist Commission ceremony at the Owensboro Sportscenter, Zack Terrell and 37 other distinguished people from Owensboro and the surrounding area were inducted into the "Hometown Heroes Hall of Fame"; Terrell's photograph is on display at the Visitor Information Center/Tourist Commission Office on East Second Street in downtown Owensboro)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2004: 21 September, Connections supplement pp.10 & 11 (Circus: Terrell was one of America's great showmen", by Glenn Hodges)

- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2007: 15 August, community section, p.2 (picture of Zack Terrill and his calliope in 1937)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2016: 21 April, p.1B ("Heartland Crossing once home to circus great", by Keith Lawrence, today, it's called Heartland Crossing, Menards has a store there but once, this was the peaceful country estate of Zachariah Terrell, one of the 20th century's top circus owners; his once said that his love of circuses began as a boy watching a man slapping a poster onto his father's barn, announcing that the John Robinson Circus was coming to town; in 1904, Terrell, then 25, left the family farm along Panther Creek and traveled to Cincinnati, where he joined the John Robinson Circus as a candy butcher, selling peanuts and popcorn, he rose rapidly through the ranks; for the next 43 years he owned or had partial ownership in almost every major circus in the US; he managed Sanger's Greater European Shows in 1912, changing the name to The Famous Robinson Circus the following year; in 1921, he acquired one-fourth of the Sells-Floto Circus and later a quarter interest in the American Circus Corp., which included Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sparks, Al G. Barnes and the John Robinson Circus, they all played under the Big Top in major cities like New York, Boston and Chicago; in 1929, when he was manager of the Sells-Floto Circus, Terrell signed Tom Mix, the cowboy star of silent films, for 10 weeks at the hefty price of \$10,000 per week, that would be worth about \$140,000 today; the five circuses in which Terrell had part ownership were getting too much of the business, so, Ringling Brothers bought all five for \$2 million and shut them down, but Terrell wasn't through; in 1933, he took over the wild animal act at the Chicago World's Fair and enlisted lion tamer Clyde Beatty as his trainer, in May 1936, after three weeks of shows in Chicago, Terrell returned to Owensboro with his new Cole Brothers-Clyde Beatty Circus, soon, it was the only circus in America that was bigger was Ringling Brothers; from 1940 to 1943, during World War II, the only two railroad circuses left in the United States were Cole Brothers and Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey, when the war ended, the number of touring circuses climbed back to six and then fell back to five in 1947; in 1948, he sold Cole Brothers for about \$350,000 -- worth roughly \$3.5 million today -- and retired to a country estate just outside Owensboro; in 1991, long after his death, Terrell was inducted into the International Circus Hall of Fame; now, his country estate is a shopping center filled with stores and shoppers and his name is largely forgotten)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2018: 15 November, p.1B ("Local calliope has a storied history", by Keith Lawrence)
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2022: 21 July, p.1C ("Heartland Crossing once farm of circus legend", by Keith Lawrence)

