



BETWEEN THE COVERS RARE BOOKS

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Harry K. and Natalie "Jackie" Franklin

[Archive]: African-American Circus Band Performer

Illinois, Ohio: 1927-1949

\$3800



A collection of 25 letters, a two volume set *The American History and Encyclopedia of Music* by W.L. Hubbard, revised and enlarged edition 1927, and 4 oversize photographs measuring 19" x 12" and 1 portrait measuring 8" x 10" with some captions. All items very good or better with tears from opening, some creasing on the photos, and edgewear.

A collection of ephemera documenting Harry K. Franklin's time as 1st trumpet with the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus Annex Band in the 1930s and 40s. The collection includes letters from his daughter Natalie, who often goes by "Jackie," as well as photographs from his time with the circus. The four oversize group photographs, included here, are sensational and feature Arthur A. Wright's Gold Medal African-American Band and Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey Annex Band in 1932 and 1938 all in full uniforms with instruments, seen here in identical photographs with different dates. A portrait of Franklin is also featured here with a caption by Natalie which reads, "Daddy." The letters, most of which are from Natalie and her husband Theo, describe their home life in Chicago and ask about Franklin's work. In a letter from August 1935 Theo writes, "how are the crowds at the circus, and do things in general seem to look any better than they did a year ago? You folks have a good chance to measure increase in business, if there is any such thing." Theo also requests a "route sheet" so they know where the circus will be traveling to. Other letters talk about family members, work, and leisure time. Natalie is often berating Franklin for not writing and "forgetting" her address. Not knowing where the circus was headed they often worried about Franklin and repeatedly ask for schedules and letters. A letter from the Cleveland Labor Day Parade director is included here for the year 1941 and explains payment and schedules for Franklin and his band for participating in the event. Additionally included is a music encyclopedia from 1927 gifted to Natalie from Franklin with the inscription, "H.K. Franklin to Jackie, Daddy's Baby 9-8-27."

The aesthetic of the Annex band that Franklin belonged to was developed, at least in part, from the tradition of 19th and early 20th century vaudeville and minstrel shows. According to historian Lynn Abbot, the Ringling Brothers band was "a body of picked musicians...the band gives an hour's overture every day, consisting of standard overtures." These tent variety shows or "tented minstrelsy" were some of the biggest employers of African-American musicians during the 1930s and 40s. Circus historian, Robert F. Houston writes that "1948 was the final year that the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus carried a traditional black sideshow band and minstrel." Arthur Wright had been the leader of the Ringling Brothers band from the early 1930s through 1948 and included Franklin in a side project band, Arthur A. Wright's Gold Medal African-American Band, seen in one of the group photos. This collection ends in 1949 with Franklin living in Cleveland.

By the start of World War II Natalie joined a WAAC (Women Army Auxiliary Corps) unit. Organized in the fall of 1942, Iowa, the all-black Thirty-Second and Thirty-third Women's Auxiliary Army Companies would become the first contingent of WAACS assigned to a military installation in the United States during World War II. She writes her father saying, "yes, the army and I seem to get along fairly well together. I sorta felt I ought to be doing something in this mess."

A modest but interesting collection of ephemera surrounding an African-American musician's time in a circus band, including large format photographs, as well as his daughter's involvement with the WAACs in World War II. [\[BTC#424870\]](#)

MIDGET CITY
OF LIVING DOLLS



Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey

COMBINED

SIDE SHOWS

CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE

MISS OLGA
BEARDED LADY



BROOKLYN N.Y. - MAY 11th 1933

E. J. KELLY
CENTURY



ARTHUR A. WHELAN'S GOLD MEDAL BAND

FRANCIS J. BROS. MARINA & WHARF ST. N.Y.

MAY 1917



RINGLING BROTHERS and BARNETT DRURY SIDE

Franklin

Photo by
E. J. KELLY
CENTURY
CO. 114 W. 47th ST.
N.Y.C.

CLEVELAND INDUSTRIAL UNION COUNCIL

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August 28, 1941

Mr. Harry K. Franklin
King Tut Lodge
5610 Scoville
Cleveland, Ohio

Dear Mr. Franklin:

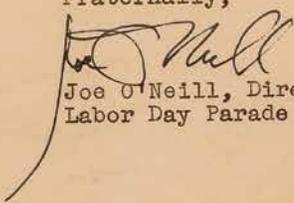
This is to confirm our arrangements concerning your band participating in the Labor Day Parade. Your band will play for the National Association of Diecasting Workers. This organization will march in Section 5 and will assemble on E. 21 St. between Euclid and Chester Ave, as is indicated on the inclosed leaflet.

Be there at 1:30 P.M. on Monday, Labor Day, as the parade will move off promptly at 1:45 P.M.

The payment for the band (\$30.00) will be made through Alex Balint, district director. If it is agreeable to you he will give it to you when you come to the line of march. If not, you can reach him at his office at the above address, and make other arrangements. His phone number is Ma 8763.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Fraternally,


Joe O'Neill, Director
Labor Day Parade

MIDGET CITY
OF LIVING DOLLS

Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey

COMBINED

SIDE SHOWS

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MISS OLGA
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BROOKLYN, N.Y. - MAY 11th 1906

E. J. KELTY -
CENTURY