



Brass Bands and Snake Oil Stands

Dennis Goodwin

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This book will take the reader on a word trip back through the recreational landscape of early America. Along the way, he or she will encounter such colorful characters as Blatz the "Human Fish," "Dinner Pail McNutt," "Big-eared Zip," "Sparrow" (a vaudeville performer who would catch ripe pumpkins with his face) and a fast-talking medicine showman who would "cure" corns right through a country bumpkin's shoes with a secret ingredient - gasoline! From the gleaming gold-and-silver stream of the great circus street parades to the pounding of the tambourines of the raucous minstrel shows, the sights and sounds of our country's early entertainment were filled to the brim with a restless energy. Annie Oakley, the Christy Minstrels, the "Boston Bird Man," "Slick and Sleepy" and all the rest will rise from the dusty pages of history and live again for a few golden moments. The reader will meet some of the greatest men and women of our time who stepped into our view on the platforms and stages that our country built to amuse itself. Carrie Nation, Booker T. Washington, and Presidents Grant, Garfield, Hayes, McKinley and Taft all strode proudly across the Chautauqua stage. Each one left footprints that would lead thousands of Americans toward new frontiers of thought. Buffalo Bill Cody, William Jennings Bryan, P. T. Barnum and a legion of other famous people, turned their efforts toward entertaining their fellow countrymen. Mixed in among these great names are those of the entertainers who didn't exactly carve a deep notch in history. Like "Fleury," for example, the vaudeville showman who painted a face on his stomach. At the end of his act, he would flip up his costume and make "faces" at the audience. Or Silk Hat Harry, the medicine showman who would eat his own soap in order to prove its purity. As the greats and the not-so-greats walk in and out of the spotlight, the airwaves will once again tingle with excitement as "The Shadow" and "The Green Hornet" fill imaginations and living rooms with "mind pictures" of their crime-fighting adventures. The circus tents will once more host the forerunners of today's glittering spectacles, as "Old Bet" the elephant and the donkey named "Zebra" perform. And the tent shows will again bring to life the rough-edged adventures of Deadwood Dick and "Roarin' Ralph, the Ring-tailed Screamer." From the "shimmy shakers" of the burlesque shows, to the "mystic mermaids" of the early museums, the readers will witness entertainment that wasn't exactly highly refined. They can savor the unpolished glittering fragments of amusement that were often as raw and uncultivated as many of the people who gathered to watch them. As they sit among the tobacco-spitting audience members of the early traveling theaters, they will hear them shout out song requests during the performances. As they read about vintage television, they can watch the poor sweltering performers of the pioneer television broadcasts. As they faced the blazing studio lights, they had to wear black lipstick so the viewers of the snowy little screens could even see their lips move. When the readers take a "word-stroll" back through America's early amusement parks, moon maidens will offer them green cheese and three hundred midgets will welcome them to their "Lilliputian Village." And as they read about the advent of the "talkies," they will smile as the sound-and-picture synchronization problems of the early cowboy movies sometimes produced "talking horses." Yes, someone may someday invent a way to drift back through the mists of time! Then we can all come face-to-face with the one-of-a-kind characters who painted these unique images on our country's amusement landscape. But until then, a reader can always download this e-book and enjoy a virtual trip back to the glorious days of Brass Bands and Snake Oil Stands.

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