

## Hartfordtown 1944

Mark Erelli

It was a dry and dusty summer day  
When that wagon train pulled in  
Just three hours 'til the matinee  
Was scheduled to begin  
As the razorbacks unloaded the flats  
A crowd did gather to see  
The elephants tow the wagons back  
To that empty lot on Barbour Street  
And the canvasmen they dug right in  
'Til on that spot where nothing had been  
You could see the bigtop from miles around  
When the circus came to Hartfordtown  
The circus it was front page news  
Back in Nineteen Forty-Four  
Everyone was grateful for any excuse  
To forget about the war  
The sun beat down on the menagerie  
In the cages the animals paced  
There was orangeade and cotton candy  
And a smile on every kid's face  
Each mother and father, each boy and girl  
They couldn't wait to see the greatest show in the world  
You could barely hear the orchestra, they cheered so loud  
When the circus came to Hartfordtown  
There were polar bears and panther cats  
With great big fangs and claws  
And the lions did a balancing act  
To jubilant applause  
Then a spotlight played on a platform set  
So high up in the air  
That everybody held their breath  
And they prayed a silent prayer  
All eyes were glued to the man on the wire  
So nobody knew when the tent caught fire  
Too slowly it dawned on the sold-out crowd  
When the circus came to Hartfordtown The fire drew air and began to climb  
The audience jumped from their seats  
There was a stampede for the exit sign  
And some fainted from the heat  
There were heroes who did their best to help  
The children escape the flames  
And the others who managed to save themselves  
They survived but were never the same  
And some still remember how the animals cried  
But there weren't any animals inside  
Over 100 people trapped as the tent burned down  
When the circus came to Hartfordtown  
As a boy I lived on Barbour Street  
Four blocks from that circus show  
And I begged my parents, I got down on my knees  
But they would not let me go  
For they had grounded me, two weeks straight  
Now I can't even remember why  
But I know the first time I ever prayed  
Was when I saw that black smoke in the sky  
And the war it was over in a year I guess  
But the people in my town didn't cheer like the rest

It still breaks our hearts to remember now