

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