**CWM Audio 1**

**Floyd King Self-Recording, December 1973**

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Part 1

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| Floyd King:  [00:00:30]  [00:01:00] | [Tom Parkinson 00:00:00] has asked me to tell me of some of the exciting experiences that myself, [Floyd King 00:00:14], had doing a career in which he operated circuses. He said in 1928, the Cole Bros. ten car circus, which he was the owner, he emerged from its winter quarters at the fairgrounds in Alexandria, Louisiana for its tour. The show shipped from Alexander into Princeton, Kentucky where they opened. |
| [00:01:30]  [00:02:00] | It seemed when the circus went into winter quarters the fall before in Alexandria to drain the engine tank, a tap was removed from the bottom of the electric light plant. It was placed on a shelf. Somehow during the winter, it was lost. Our bus mechanic who was very capable had left us, and he was replaced by a new man who came to me early in the spring and told me that the tap was out, and he would have to have an aluminum tap made to fit the opening, which he did. |
| [00:02:30]  [00:03:00] | Everything moved along nicely in the opening stand at Princeton in Kentucky. However, the next morning, early, they told me that as they were getting ready to pack up the light plant and cut it off. They said the jolting of the engine had loosened the tap onto the oil tank, and all of the oil poured out. The motor ran for some time with no oil and was torn up considerably. The next morning, when I found all of this, I got a list of the parts that were needed, and I ordered ahead to Buffalo, New York where these Buffalo Engines were made. They made thousands for the government during the war, and this was one that we had purchased in Mount Sterling, Kentucky from a dealer who had bought about 25 or 30 of them. |
| [00:03:30]  [00:04:00]  [00:04:30] | Every day for ten days or two weeks, we had to have a light strung to our electric light wagon. Some time from the business area into the showgrounds, some time it went as far a quarter or half a mile. This light, it was a wire that was plugged into our light wagon to illuminate the show at night. When we got over to O'Fallon, Illinois about 10 days later, a man came on from Mount Stirling, Kentucky with a new engine, replacing the old one, which he took back. We'd already had it plugged it, so we went ahead that night in [inaudible 00:04:29] with this local wiring. This cost a several day minimum of $50 to have it connected up with the city lights. |
| [00:05:00]  [00:05:30] | We moved on up the line, and we got up through Wisconsin, and we were showing at [Marquette 00:04:53], Minnesota. We had a [inaudible 00:04:57] [Swab 00:04:58] who lived near Cincinnati. He had an assistant named [Lograss Bill Camel 00:05:04] who originally came from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Mr. Camel was married to Mrs. [Mabel Hall 00:05:17] whose parents had operated very small circuses. Mr. Camel came to me, and told me, he says, "I don't know whether you know it or not, but there was a White boy on the sideshow who has a case of small pox. I noticed it was broken out on his face." |
| [00:06:00]  [00:06:30]  [00:07:00] | I got a hold to a cousin of mine name Fred Roberts. He had been an intern in the war and was assistant to doctors and finally learned how to give shots and get working men out of the sleeping car in the morning by giving them compound cathartic pills and so forth. So I got a hold of Fred Roberts, who was a first cousin of mine, and told him to go down and get this boy. Go to the ticket wagon and get several books of Pennsylvania mileage. It ran from that northern country of Wisconsin into Chicago. I said, "Now, I want to you take this boy, put him on the train which leaves Champion, Minnesota, or Champion, Wisconsin it was, about 7:00 at night and due in Chicago the next morning about 7:30 or 8:00." |
| [00:07:30]  [00:08:00] | Several days went by. In fact, it was a week when I ran into Mr. Hall again. He said to me, he said, "I see that fellow is still on the show with the small pox, and his case is very virulent. Now he's broken out in his face and on his arms and hands. I got a hold to Mr. Roberts, and I said, "Did you take this man to Chicago like I told you?" He says, "I'm awful sorry, but I forgot." Well, I says, "You're liable to get us into a great deal of small pox struggle because he's still on the show, and we have to get him out tonight. I want you to take him into Chicago. When you get to Chicago, take him to his second or third or fourth class hotel upstairs at [Fair Inn 00:08:03], register him, pay him a week's lodging, keep him there a day or two, give him eating money, and he's on back to the show with the mileage, which you have." He says, "I will do it." |
| [00:08:30]  [00:09:00]  [00:09:30] | I went uptown. By this time, we were in [Ironwood 00:08:21], Michigan, which is adjacent to Ironwood, Minnesota. I was in a drug store getting a Coca-Cola. Mr. [Woolsey Cox 00:08:38], who had a concession with the show selling razors and so forth, came to me, and he says, "I was in the courthouse, or rather the City Hall, and your man was arranging for the" ... I got a hold of Mr. Cox, and we hurried out to the circus grounds. He told me that he was standing on the steps of the City Hall when someone said, "Are you going to the circus today?" to some officials, and one says, "Yes. We got notification from Lansing, Michigan. They have small pox on the show, and we on the way out there now to investigate. If they have small pox on the show, we'll keep them in the fairgrounds for two weeks until it is cleared up." |
| [00:10:00]  [00:10:30]  [00:11:00] | I got in a automobile with Mr. Cox. We hurried out to the circus grounds. As we drove in the fairgrounds, or rather ballpark, we saw this man sitting on the running gear of a sideshow wagon. The tongue was on the ground. He was taking a sunbath. One glance at him showed that he had a virulent case of small pox. His hands and arms and face was literally covered with scores of small pox sores. We got him in a car right quick and carried him about a quarter of a mile to a small mountain, got him inside the fence, and we told him to stay there until we came out to him. Anybody came in, to not come near them, but to go back up into the mountains. We hurried on back to the grounds, and as we got there, we ran into several officials who told us they were health officers and had been instructed by the state health department in Lansing to investigate a Cole Bros. Circus early. That they heard that we had small pox on the show. |
| [00:11:30]  [00:12:00] | Well, I said, "The best thing to do is look it over." So, we started at the candy stands and moved on around. I carried them back as slow as I could and got a hold of Fred Roberts, told him to go down to the sleeping cars and get everybody out. Nobody to be in there at all. We went on back and down to the dressing room. We saw several of the athletes in there, in the short sleeves playing cards. There was no room for them to ride in the street parade. Well, he says, "These fellows all seems to be very healthy and so forth." So we moved on through the menagerie tent as slow as we could and into the big tent and then came over to the sideshow. The health fellow says, "Well, now we'll have to go down to the circus train to see if anybody's in there." |
| [00:12:30]  [00:13:00] | I told Mr. Roberts when he got this fellow planted over in the mountains to hurry on down and get everybody out of the sleeping cars. We got about 300 feet out of the ballpark, and we ran into Mr. Roberts on the way down to the train. When we got down to the train, the good Lord was with us. They went from one end to the other, and there was nobody on there at all. However, we didn't know that our sleeping car porter on the private car, which I used along with others, had broken out with one large small pox scar on his face. |
| [00:13:30]  [00:14:00]  [00:14:30] | I told the health officers, "Well," I says, "You couldn't find nothing." He says, "We'll report back to headquarters in Lansing and tell them we found no evidence of small pox on the show and wait for their verdict." They came back to me a little bit later and said they had notification from the state health department in Lansing whereby every human being connected with the circus had to be vaccinated before the show would be allowed to move out of town. So as a result of it was we had about 200 people with the circus, and of course, small pox vaccine in Ironwood, Minnesota, Ironwood, Michigan was very limited. So they sent over to the state prison located on the outskirts of Marquette, Michigan on the lake, to send over by motor squad, motor troops, about 225 vaccine capsules. So vaccines [inaudible 00:14:14] could be vaccinated. We line our people up in the sideshow. I was the first one to get vaccinated. One or two kind of hesitated. I told them they either had to be vaccinated or get off the show, and they decided to stay on. |
| [00:15:00] | When they left the showgrounds, I got a hold of Mr. Cox. We went over to this mountain where this virulent case had developed with the sideshow boy. Got him and put him in the backseat of the automobile on the floor. I laid a lap robe over him and cupped my feet on top of that. Started down to the train, and at the train we picked up the colored porter who we very luckily had missed earlier. We put him in the front seat on the right of the driver. Put him on the front seat to the left of the driver and started to get out of town. |
| [00:15:30]  [00:16:00] | We got about halfway over to [Hawley 00:15:32], Minnesota about a mile from the circus grounds, about three miles from the circus grounds. We ran into the parade coming back on the one way street. There was a little opening on the side. We pulled in there and was waiting for the parade to pass. While we were there waiting with this boy on the floor of the car and the lap robe up on top of him, a state patrolman came by on a motorcycle, parked his car alongside our automobile with his hand resting on the auto body. He was also waiting for the parade to pass. |
| [00:16:30]  [00:17:00] | When the parade passed, we started out to get these two virulent cases of small pox off of the show. We got over to Ironwood, and we [inaudible 00:16:37] the town. Went on over to Hawley and about five miles this side of Champion, Minnesota, we found a woods where a second growth of timber had been cut. We went though the fence and took these two small pox victims back into the woods, and we told them we would be back for them. We were going to leave that night about a little after 6:00 over to Champion to put them on the Milwaukee train to take them to the hospital. We told them to let no one get near them. If anybody came into the woods, to go back hide from them. |
| [00:17:30]  [00:18:00] | We went on back. It was a very hot day. In the afternoon, Mr. Cox took some soda pop and Coca-Cola and sandwiches over to these two boys. That night, I told him, I says, "Now, go over and pick these two boys up. Take them to Champion. The train leaves on to Milwaukee at 7:00 or 7:30. Take them into Chicago. Put them in the second or third class hotel upstairs. Pay their rent for several days. And in a couple of days, leave them spending money, and walk on out and come on back to the circus with the route that you have and the mileage that you have to come back on." |
| [00:18:30]  [00:19:00] | That night, in Ironwood after these people had been shipped off, or rather that morning, I was eating breakfast. I picked up the Chicago Evening American of the night before printed in Chicago, which had arrived in Ironwood early that morning. While eating breakfast, I read the first section, put the second section in my pocket or in my coat pocket. Went on out to the circus grounds, hung my coat with the second section in the ticket wagon. I was busy all day with the activities around the show. And that night about 5:30, I cleared my work up in the ticket wagon, and I reached over to read the second section of the Chicago American published the night before. |
| [00:19:30]  [00:20:00]  [00:20:30] | On the first page with a two column head with a couple of drops of type, a whole full column and a quarter, a case, which I will now describe. It read like this, "Small pox victim sent from circus, picked up in Chicago, and sent to pest camp." They had the complete story that the conductor on the Milwaukee train saw these two patients, one of whom we had provided with prepare of [inaudible 00:19:58]. He looked at them, and he figured that they had small pox, and he warned ahead to Milwaukee when an officer got on a train there, a Milwaukee railroad officer, who warned on into Chicago about 85 miles, and told them that there were definitely two cases of small pox on their such and such a car, and to have this car taken out of the Union depot there in Chicago upon arrival, with an ambulance to take these boys to the pest house. |
| [00:21:00] | When we got into Chicago, everything was waiting for us. They had a pest control wagon there, and the police arrested Fred Roberts, who had charge of him. He was tried in court several days later, they later found. In the meantime, these men were taken to the pest house until the small pox had been cleared up, or in the case of several weeks. We expected Fred Roberts back on the circus. |
| [00:21:30]  [00:22:00] | We got over into North Dakota in a town called Williston, North Dakota. In the spring going out of winter quarters, we had ordered about $300 worth of Cracker Jack from a factory in Chicago and told them that we would pay for them on June the 15th, which so happened was the date that we were in Williston, North Dakota. I ran into Mr. Swab, and he told me that the sheriff had handed him papers where the circus had been attached for $300 for Cracker Jack. I told him that we had paid the bill, and the certified check had arrived in Chicago that particular Saturday morning. A little later, the sheriff came over and told us to forget about the indictment, the attachment, as the check had arrived. |
| [00:22:30]  [00:23:00] | A little bit later, we had a telegram from [Walter Driver 00:22:29] associated with his brother Charlie in the manufacturing of circus tents. This was a day letter from Walter Driver from Chicago saying, "I have a phone call from a fellow in the county work house. He said his name was Fred Roberts, and they're holding him there for $225 balance of his fine for bringing small pox patient into the state. He asked me to get the money from you and to pay it so he could get back to the circus on." I quickly went to the Western Union and wired Mr. Driver the money and told him to send Fred Roberts on, I named the town where he was coming to. |
| [00:23:30]  [00:24:00] | So that ended the case of the small pox on the circus. When we got into North Dakota, of course, we were very glad that small pox was a thing of the past for us. If they had discovered the small pox on the show in Ironwood, Michigan, they would've held the circus inside of the fairgrounds there for two weeks. By that time, we would be two weeks behind our billing crew. And billing crew at that time, two weeks ahead would've been a thousand miles away [inaudible 00:24:02] over into North Dakota into Montana. So much the good Lord was with us. |
| [00:24:30]  [00:25:00]  [00:25:30] | When we got into Thief River Falls, Minnesota several days later, the treasurer of the show on Sunday morning ran into me on the street. We were not showing that day. And he told me, he says, "Well, we got knocked off last night." I says, "What do you mean you got knocked off?" Well, he says, "Somebody got in the money safe and took out my money bag with the various half a dozen different bank rolls that are for different concession, people with the circus. All together they got away with, in addition to these bank rolls, about $250 in smaller change and small bills belonging to the circus." Well, I says, "What happened to this big American Express safe where this money was locked up in? Did you forget to lock it?" He says, "No, I always carefully locked it every night after I put the bag inside and tested it carefully. And when I opened it the next morning, the bag was gone, and the safe was locked up." |
| [00:26:00]  [00:26:30] | A little later during the day, some working men on the Great Northern Railroad on which we were traveling came to the circus and said, "We found this money bag about thirty miles out of town. It was locked, and they had broken it open, and we brought it into the circus. We figured someone with the circus had made this robbery and threw this money bag out of the window after they cleared up and they got the money out." We suspicious several fellows around the circus. Later in the afternoon, we went to the post office and asked if anybody had bought any large amount of money orders, and also went to the two or three banks here in Thief River Falls and asked them if anyone had been in with a lot of small change to buy a draft or anything, to which we could find nothing. |
| [00:27:00] | About a week went by, and the treasurer came to me, says, "I think I'll have most of this bank rolls stolen back on the show a little later in the day." Well, I says, "What happened?" Well, he says, "I got a hold of the nigger porter, and I found out when you left winter quarters in Alexandria, Louisiana, around about Christmas time, you had to have a lock on the show. A card attached, what it was a particular key for. And among them was the key to the American Express safe." |
| [00:27:30]  [00:28:00] | We found out that this colored boy whom we had pick up in Benton Harbor, Michigan, a pretty smart dark fellow, we found out that he had a duplicate key to the American Express safe file. The treasurer told me that during the course of the season, several times they had missed various sums of money out of the ticket wagon. Anyway, he talked this fellow to give up the money, and he brought it on down. Most of it had been returned. He had hidden it in the kitchen of my private car. He took the wooden part away from the commode. It was hidden in the commode behind the wooden part. We gave this colored boy some mileage to get him away from the show, and away he went. |
| [00:28:30] | The following winter along in January, I was going down [Wabash 00:28:28] Street in Chicago, and I ran into the colored boy who was the small pox victim. He told me he was working as a porter for the Auditorium Theater, and he was very happy to be there. We laughed about our experience with the small pox. |
|  | Thanks a million. |