

## Ricketts' Circus in Lancaster

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

JOHN BILL RICKETTS, a Scotch equestrian, who had learned many of his astounding acts when he was associated with the Blackfriars' Bridge circus, London, came to Philadelphia in 1792, and erected a building for a riding school at the south-west corner of Twelfth and Market streets. His success as a riding-master was such that he soon tore down this structure and built a larger one, fitted up as a circus. This was opened to the public April 12th, 1793. General Washington attended a performance here on April 22nd, of the same year. Two years later, on account of his popularity, he built an amphitheatre, with a seating capacity of 1,400, at the corner of Sixth and Chestnut streets, which was opened to the public on October 19th, 1795. In this building Ricketts did many daring feats, one of which was that of riding two horses at full speed with each foot on a quart cup resting, unfastened, on each saddle. The circus proved very popular, and the proprietor greatly prospered. A fire, however, on December 17th, 1799, destroyed the building, and Ricketts was financially ruined, his loss being over \$20,000.00—a large sum for those days. Until that time this was the most disastrous fire that had visited Philadelphia. The unfortunate showman, discouraged, shortly after returned to England.

It was during his very successful circus performances in Philadelphia, that Ricketts gave similar exhibitions in Lancaster. The Lancaster Journal of Saturday, July 22nd, 1797, contained an announcement that "Mr. Ricketts is erecting a temporary circus on the lot directly back of Mr. Wilson's tavern, at the south end of the town." The "New Amphitheatre," as it was styled in the advertisement, was to be opened in the course of the ensuing week, with a grand display of horsemanship, tumbling, etc. The acts were fully described in the hand bills of the day, not one of which, so far as I have been able to learn, has survived the wreck of time.

The "new circus" was opened to the public on Saturday, July 29th, 1797. A building, probably erected of wood, was located back of Robert Wilson's tavern. This tavern stood in the third block of South Queen street on the west side. It was located on the third lot south of Farnum street, and is numbered 560 on the Hamilton plan. The lot measured 64 feet 4½ inches on South Queen street and extended in depth 252 feet to a 14 foot alley. The Lancaster Journal, of July 29th, 1797, stated that the performance would include the following acts:

1. Horsemanship, by Master Franklin, who will perform several surprising feats, never attempted by any of his age.
2. Mr. Ricketts will ride in full speed and pick up a watch from the ground, blindfolded.
3. Still vaulting and curious equilibriums by Mr. Ricketts, Mr. Franklin, Mr. Tomlinson, Master Franklin and Master Hutchins.
4. Comic feats of horsemanship, by Mr. Franklin (the clown).
5. A string of flip flaps across the circle, by Mr. Ricketts.
6. Mr. Ricketts and Mr. Tomlinson will vault over each other's heads, on a single horse, going full speed.
7. Ground and lofty tumbling.
8. The wonderful sagacity of horses will be shown by their lying down, sitting up, etc., etc.

It was also stated that there were "many other surprising feats of horsemanship, too numerous to mention" in the advertisement. The performance concluded with an act entitled "The Taylor's Disaster," by Mrs. Tomlinson.

The doors, for the first performance only, were opened at one o'clock in order to accommodate people residing in the country. The show started precisely at two. The doors for the evening performance, which was a repetition of that in the afternoon, opened at 4:30 and the show commenced precisely at 5:30. The price of admission was one dollar for a box seat, and fifty cents for a seat in the pit. Performances were given on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The advertisement stated that the amusements would be varied each evening.

In addition to entertaining the public with the circus on three days out of every week, the management advertised that ladies and gentlemen would be "instructed in the polite art of riding, and managing their horses, either for the road or field: and horses of every denomination broke."

The Lancaster Journal of Saturday, August 19th, 1797, informed the public that "for the benefit of Master Franklin" one of the actors, Ricketts' new circus would open on that day at two, and the show commence precisely at three o'clock. Mr. Ricketts' benefit was to be held on Monday next, when the performance would be more splendid than any that had been given in Lancaster. The following Saturday, August 26th, for the benefit of Mr. Franklin (clown to the horsemanship) and son, the greatest exertions were made to render the entertainment particularly interesting.

The last performance of Ricketts' circus in Lancaster,—“for the benefit of Mr. Tomlinson,” another actor—was given on Saturday, September 2nd, 1797. The Lancaster Journal of this date informed the public that the building occupied by the circus during its stay in Lancaster, which had been advertised for sale on this day, had been disposed of by private contract.

It is a pleasure to state that Mr. Ricketts gave several benefits while he was in Philadelphia, for a fuel fund for the needy, and that during the more than a century and a quarter that have elapsed since then, this fine charity has continued its noble ministry of service to the worthy poor of that city. Surely, this generous benefactor deserved a better fate than that which befell him!

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## Music in Trinity Church Steeple

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

THE LANCASTER JOURNAL of Tuesday, August 1st, 1809, contained an announcement stating that "Mr. Gaetano Carusi, master of Italian music, with three sons, the eldest aged 13 and the youngest 9, are in Lancaster, waiting for public patronage. The lovers of fine music will now have an opportunity of deriving exquisite pleasure from the performance of the best composition, by the hand of a first-rate master. His sons are, indeed, prodigies in the delightful art. The gentlemen of the lodge [No. 43, Free and Accepted Masons] have granted Mr. Carusi their fine room over the market-house [Masonic Hall, 13 West King street. The original building, erected in 1798, is still standing in 1928], for to-morrow night, and it is sincerely hoped that the ladies and gentlemen of Lancaster will, on this occasion, give Mr. Carusi the encouragement he so justly merits. The price of admission will be only half a dollar a ticket."

Shortly after their arrival in Lancaster, Mr. Carusi and his three sons played before the home of Simon Synder. At that time Mr. Snyder was the governor of Pennsylvania, and Lancaster borough was the capital.