

The Erie Canal: The Traveling Circus



New York Agricultural Fair, attr. John Wilson, c. 1850, Oil on board, Albany Institute of History & Art, gift of Ellen H. Leslie, 2013.21

The circus was one of the first forms of American popular entertainment. Before marching bands, radio, television, and computer games, entertainers traveled across our nation to amaze people with performing acrobats and rare animals. The painting above includes a view of the tent of the June & Co.'s circus (lower left) as well as the Spalding and Rogers Circus (center right) at the New York Agricultural Fair.

After wintering in Cincinnati, the June & Co.'s Circus started their 1842 season in Elizabethtown, Ohio, and ended in New York City.

They were well known for their acrobats who performed on the backs of horses. People traveled for miles to see them.

In 184 days, the circus traveled 2,482 miles and performed in 141 different cities; 23 of those were in New York State.

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1. Looking closely at the map above, and the painting of the Agricultural Fair of 1850 on the previous page, what water route did the June & Co. Circus travel from Buffalo to Albany?

2. On which body of water would they have traveled from Cleveland to Buffalo?

3. What else could people see at the Agricultural Fair?



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