



Elephant Story: Jumbo and P.T. Barnum Under the Big Top

Les Harding

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The newspapers called him "Overshadowing Monarch Mastodon, " "Behemoth of Holy Writ" and "Prodigious Mountain." He was the main event at the greatest show on earth: Jumbo, at around 61/2 tons and almost 12 feet tall, the biggest elephant anyone had ever seen. Jumbos mere presence in the Barnum, Bailey and Hutchinson circus guaranteed an additional \$3,000 a day in box office receipts. More of an exhibit than a performer, Jumbo was simply paraded around the three rings. But still the people came, just to marvel at the size of this monster pachyderm. This work traces Jumbos capture in East Africa, his life in the London Zoo, the controversy over his sale for \$10,000 to American showman P.T. Barnum, his journey across the Atlantic, his life as the most famous attraction in Barnums circus, and his tragic death in a railway accident in Canada in 1885.

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