



# American Legends: The Life of P.T. Barnum

*Charles River Editors*

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- \*Includes pictures.
- \*Includes Barnum's own quotes about his life and career.
- \*Highlights Barnum's entertainment career and transition into the circus.
- \*Includes a bibliography for further reading.

"I was a farmhand, a merchant, a clerk, a boss, a theater director and a bank director; I lived in prisons and palaces, I knew poverty and abundance, I've traveled extensively on two continents, I've met all kinds of people and seen the human character in all its guises, and time and again I have been in the greatest danger. Amidst such a diversity of events, I had to undergo difficult times, but I'm definitely not complaining, and I believe that my life was a happy one, because I always saw the positive side of things." – P.T. Barnum

A lot of ink has been spilled covering the lives of history's most influential figures, but how much of the forest is lost for the trees? In Charles River Editors' American Legends series, readers can get caught up to speed on the lives of America's most important men and women in the time it takes to finish a commute, while learning interesting facts long forgotten or never known.

Americans have loved traveling circuses for generations, and none represent the country's love for entertainment quite like the most famous of them all, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Circus promoters have long been viewed as somewhat shady hucksters, but none could top Phineas Taylor Barnum, who used a blend of traditional circus entertainment, freak show exhibits, and outright hoaxes to create "The Greatest Show on Earth". Barnum introduced America to Jumbo the Elephant, one of the most legendary acts in the history of the circus, as well as "exhibits" like Joice Heth, an elderly African American woman Barnum advertised as a 161 year old who nursed George Washington. He also notoriously perpetrated hoaxes with General Tom Thumb and claimed to have a live mermaid, so it's no surprise that Barnum is often apocryphally quoted as saying, "There's a sucker born every minute." While he didn't actually say that, he said something similar: "Nobody ever lost a dollar by underestimating the taste of the American public."

In fact, Barnum had specialized in circus entertainment decades before traveling circuses were truly a national sensation, particularly thanks to the popularity of the Barnum American Museum in New York City. Barnum's museum offered something for everyone across its different halls, from poetic readings to animal exhibits, and all the while, Barnum was defiant when confronted by criticism, reminding people, "I am a showman by profession...and all the gilding shall make nothing else of me." Of course, Barnum was selling himself short by calling himself merely a showman, because during the course of his adventurous life, he was a shrewd businessman, a politician, and the country's most famous and notorious promoter of both entertainment and himself.

American Legends: The Life of P.T. Barnum examines the life and career of the man most responsible for the kinds of circus entertainment that still fascinate Americans of all ages. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about P.T. Barnum like never before, in no time at all.

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