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UMass Amherst Libraries 

# George Emery Papers

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After graduating from Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1924, George Edward "Red" Emery taught high school briefly and held a handful of other jobs before deciding to fulfill a childhood dream. Born in Marlboro, Mass., in 1904, Emery turned his love

for the circus into a life touring the country as a white-face circus clown. After marrying Virginia Link, a Smith College student, in 1932, he settled down to a stable job in the Alumni Office at his alma mater, later filling in as Veterans Coordinator and as a staff member in the Student Placement Office until his retirement in 1972. Emery never left the circus behind entirely. Throughout his years in Amherst he continued to talk and write about the history of the circus and his personal experiences, and from the late 1940s through early 1960s, he used his show business connections to book talent for the Three County Fair. Longtime residents of Leverett, Mass., he and his wife died within a year of one another, Virginia in 1974 and George in 1975.

With his passion for the circus, George Emery's papers contain material not only from his career as a circus clown in the 1920s but also from his later writings about the history of the circus, his work with the Three County Fair, and his long association with UMass Amherst. The collection includes correspondence with friends and family; circus toys and games; posters, photographs, and ephemera; and a library of books on circus history. Of special note are some exceptional photographs and a thick sheaf of material from the Three County Fair.

## Background on George Emery

"No job brings quite the same satisfaction as the one of making people laugh or smile." --George Emery, *Springfield Sunday Union and Republican*, May 29, 1938.

George Edward "Red" Emery, born in Marlboro, Massachusetts, in 1904, was an ardent lover and devoted supporter of the circus, fascinated even at the age of three, in Emery's words, "by the monkeyshines of the clowns." After graduating from Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1924 and working a few various jobs, including a brief tenure as a high school teacher, Emery decided to chase his childhood dream and, in the most literal sense of the phrase, ran off to join the circus. He started as a "property boy" for the Sells-Floto Circus in 1923, "but the lure of the spotlight soon drew him to a performing role as a clown." Performing as a white-face clown as a part of many circuses, including the famous Walter L. Main Circus, Emery toured the country and made deep friendships and connections with his fellow performers which he would maintain throughout his life. This period would chisel into stone his passion for the circus, though he was not to remain a lifelong performer.



Three County Fair, ca. 1920

George Emery's love of the circus brought him into the touring clown lifestyle, but his love of Virginia Link, a Smith College student, would take him out of it, at least as a full-time performer. Emery and Link married in 1932 and George quickly settled back in the Pioneer Valley, taking a job in the Alumni Office at his alma mater, now known as Massachusetts State College. Emery would work within the University of Massachusetts Amherst for the rest of his career, becoming Veterans Coordinator and a staff member at the Student Placement Office until his retirement in 1972.

Although Emery's professional life in the circus officially ended in 1932, he remained a dedicated follower and member of the circus community for his whole life. Emery used his connections built up during his time as a performer in order to assist the Three County Fair in Northampton, Massachusetts. He served on the board of directors beginning in 1938 and worked as a talent agent for the fair, finding acts from various talent agencies and recommendations from other circus associates. Emery also wrote the program for the 150th anniversary of the fair in 1967, which contained a detailed history of the fair and endorsements of the fair's role for the local area as well as American culture from the Secretary of Agriculture at the time, Orville Freeman, as well as the Governor of Massachusetts, John Volpe. Governor Volpe wrote of the fair, "The country fair is part and parcel of the Massachusetts heritage and way of life. It is one of our strong ties with a past that is colorful and worthy of great pride." Alongside his work with the Three County Fair, Emery was a member of the Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Agricultural Society, the Massachusetts Agricultural Fairs Association, as well as the International Association of Fairs and Expositions. Eventually, his work and contributions to the circus community were recognized with an Award of Achievement from the International Association of Fairs and Expositions.

Emery's love for everything circus-related extended beyond the fairgrounds and into his personal life, as well. Over the years, he became a dedicated collector and preserver of circus history. Emery collected all types of materials related to this American institution, including posters, programs, toys, news clippings, vinyl records, artwork, and over 80 works of literature about the circus and the performers within it. Notably, Emery kept extensive notes of the fairs he attended over his lifetime, as well as detailed notes of their programs or the performance details of individual acts. He also desired to spread his love of the circus to

others, giving lectures and writing numerous newspaper articles about various aspects of the fair. Many of these articles were preserved in homemade scrapbooks, including one featured in Yankee magazine in June of 1936 about the seven jokes clowns have used throughout history, writing, "The clown you watch may use new wardrobe, a new technique in pantomime, new props. But his joke will be the joke that wasn't new a century ago."

After his retirement, Emery maintained contact with many of his old friends and circus associates and attended circuses all over the region. George and Virginia, having lived in Leverett, Massachusetts for the majority of their lives, died within a year of each other; Virginia passed in 1974 and George in 1975.

## Scope of collection

The papers of George Emery contain materials for any researcher interested in the circus and the performing arts. Correspondence to and by Emery from friends, family, as well as business acquaintances is featured. Circus advertisements, posters, vinyl records, toys, photographs, talent catalogs, newsletters, magazines, a wealth of books on circus history, and ephemera also feature heavily in this collection. Materials to be especially noted are an excellent collection of photographs of circuses, including famous circuses such as the Hagenbeck Wallace Circus, Kay Bros. Circus, the world-famous Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Combined Circus, as well as smaller, more local fairs, such as a large collection of photographs of the 1962 Littleville Fair in Chester, Massachusetts.

Also of note is an extensive sheaf of material on the Three County Fair (Franklin, Hampshire, and Hampden Counties, Massachusetts), including promotional materials, photographs from the 1950 edition of the fair, and logistical documents, along with materials from Emery's long association with the University of Massachusetts Amherst, including the Master Plan architectural proposal for the expansion of the university in 1957.

## Series descriptions

### Series 1. Correspondence

1904-1975

Correspondence from all periods of Emery's life, including letters both personal and professional in nature. Letters are included from family, friends, and professional contacts, and there is extensive correspondence with talent agencies. Of note are letters in 1967 from the Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, and the Governor of Massachusetts, John Volpe, about the 150th anniversary of the Three County Fair. Also included is correspondence from Virginia Link, Clyde O'Neal, Herbert Connelly, and G. Bartlett Willard.

### Series 2. Professional

1898-1974

Materials from Emery's professional life, both with the circus and with the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Included are numerous advertisements and posters for various circuses and individual acts, including extensive materials on the Three County Fair. Also of note are talent catalogs, notes and materials from George Emery about the circus, newsletters and booklets from fair associations from the local to the international scale, vinyl records of circus music, and homemade scrapbooks by Emery of articles written by him about the circus.

### Series 3. Personal

1875-1974

Materials from Emery's personal life; of special note is Emery's collection of circus toys, some of which date back to 1904, and a home magic kit from 1917. Other materials included are a large collection of greeting cards, a botany notebook from a class Virginia Link took at Smith College, an extensive collection of newspaper clippings related to the circus, and materials and ephemera from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

### Series 4. Photographs, Artwork, Realia

1893-1967

Photographs and artwork collected by Emery, mostly related to the circus. Of special note are the photograph collections of the 1950-1951 Three County Fair and the 1962 Littleville Fair as well as a pastel portrait of George Emery in full clown make-up by his wife, Virginia Link.

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"Educational Exhibits: How to Prepare and Use Them" by U.S. Department of Agriculture  
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Emery, George: List of Circuses Attended  
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Emery, George: Notes, Programs for Other Circuses and Performance Details of Specific Acts  
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Griffin, Chas. E.: *Traveling with a circus*. N.UU. : Chas. E. Griffith  
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International Association of Fairs and Expositions News Bulletin  
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Harper's Young People Magazine  
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Link, Virginia: Smith College Botany Notebook  
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Little olde folks concerte, at ye Marlboro Unitarian meeting house  
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Magic pamphlets  
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Box 12: 10  
*Secrets of ancient and modern magic, or the art of conjuring unveiled*. Palmyra, Pa. : Ideal Novelty Co.  
ca.1900  
Wehman Bros.: *Card tricks*. NY : Wehman Bros.  
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"The Flying Codonas" Painting by Curry, John Steuart

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Box 3: 5

News Clippings: Circus Cartoons and Artwork

1940 Feb-1973 Feb

Box 3: 6

News Clippings: Circus Cartoons and Artwork

undated

Box 3: 7

Pastel Portrait of Clown by Farrell, R.



1970 Dec

Map Case 8:1: 1

Photograph: Banquet of the 21st Annual Meeting of the the Massachusetts Agricultural Fairs Association

1941 Jan

Map Case 7:1: 4

Photographs: Clown and goose; naval officer; MAC football player

1885

Box 12: 12

Photograph: Derose, Charles N.

undated

Box 3: 15

Photographs: Emery, George and Link, Virginia

1941

Box 3: 16

Photograph: Fling, Bill and Pat ("The Thunder Birds")

undated

Box 3: 17

Photograph: Gentry Bros. Circus

1928 Aug

Map Case 7:1: 4

Photograph: Hagenbeck Wallace Circus Clowns

1931 Jun

Map Case 7:1: 4

Some clowns labeled on reverse

Photograph: Japanese Horse

undated

Box 3: 18

Photograph: Kay Bros. Circus

1936 Jun

Map Case 7:1: 4

Some performers labeled on reverse

Photograph: LaTena's Circus

1916

Box 3: 19

Photographs: Punkin and Doll

1944 Aug

Box 3: 20

Photograph: Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Combined Circus Clowns

1937 Jun

Map Case 7:1: 4

Some clowns labeled on reverse

Photograph: Sells-Floto Circus Swinging Ladders, Double Trap, Contortionist, and Head Balance Acts

1931

Map Case 7:1: 4

Some performers labeled on reverse

Photograph: Three Hunts Circus Ring

1933 Jun

Map Case 7:1: 4

Some performers labeled on reverse

Photographs: University of Massachusetts Amherst

undated

Box 3: 21

Photograph: Walter L. Main Circus

1927

Map Case 7:1: 4

Photograph: Wilson, James and Jerry ("The Flying Behrs")

undated  
Box 3: 22  
Pressed Paper Art  
undated  
Box 3: 31  
Print: Amundson, Paul  
1938 Dec  
Box 3: 32  
Prints and Negatives: Barnett Bros. Circus Tournament Riders, "Wild West," Clown Group with Robert Powell  
undated  
Box 3: 33  
Prints and Negatives: Borella Trio  
undated  
Box 3: 34  
Prints: Cassy, Bill and Lawless, Bill  
1950-1951?  
Box 3: 35  
Prints and Negatives: Deacon's Calliopy  
1903-1922  
Box 3: 36  
Prints and Negatives: Dixon and Seal  
1940  
Box 3: 37  
Print: Doran, Steve and Nelligan, Nick with Indian Clubs  
1950-1951?  
Box 3: 38  
Prints and Negatives: Emery, George and Circus Toys  
1942  
Box 3: 39  
Prints and Negatives: Emery, George Grotesque and White-Face Make-ups  
1937  
Box 3: 40  
Prints, Negatives, and Slides: Emery, George Portraits  
undated  
Box 3: 41  
Prints: Flowers by Waugh, Frank for "Doran's Garden" Piece  
undated  
Box 3: 42  
Prints and Negatives: The Flying La Vans  
1893  
Box 3: 43  
Prints: The Flying Meteors  
1943  
Box 3: 44  
Prints and Negatives: Gentry Bros. Circus Midway  
undated  
Box 3: 45  
Prints and Negatives: Hanneford, Poodles and Plamondon, Louie  
undated  
Box 3: 46  
Prints: Hubert Castle Talent Agency  
undated  
Box 3: 47  
Prints and Negatives: Hunt Bros. Circus Back Door  
1950-1951?  
Box 3: 48  
Prints and Negatives: La Pearl Clown Band  
undated  
Box 3: 49

Prints and Negatives: Lewis and Olivers, Passing Leap  
1940  
Box 3: 50  
Prints: Littleville Fair  
1962  
Box 3: 51  
Prints: Littleville Fair  
1962  
Box 3: 52  
Prints: Lordly and Dame, Inc. Talent Shots  
1967 Dec-1968 Nov  
Box 3: 53  
Prints: Lubera, Paul  
1968 Sep-1973 Jan  
Box 3: 54  
Prints: Music Corporation of America (MCA) Talent Shots  
1954  
Box 3: 55  
Prints: Music Corporation of America (MCA) Talent Shots  
1954  
Box 3: 56  
Prints and Negatives: "Muddy Grotesque"  
undated  
Box 3: 57  
Prints: O'Neal, Clyde and Dog  
1935  
Box 3: 58  
Print: Robertson, Jimmie Water Color of Cole Bros. Circus Posters  
undated  
Box 3: 59  
Print: Ross, Skip and Bell Collection  
1944  
Box 3: 60  
Print: Southwark Fair Engraving  
1937  
Map Case 7:1: 4  
Originally engraved 1733  
  
Print: Thumb, Tom and Warren, Lavinia  
undated  
Box 3: 61  
Prints and Negatives: Tom Mix Clowns, Claramen Bruce  
undated  
Box 3: 62  
Prints and Negatives: Three County Fair  
1950-1951?  
Box 4: 1  
Prints and Negatives: Three County Fair  
1950-1951?  
Box 4: 2  
Prints and Negatives: Three County Fair  
1950-1951?  
Box 4: 3  
Prints and Negatives: Three County Fair  
1950-1951?  
Box 4: 4  
Prints: Unknown Subjects  
undated  
Box 4: 5  
Prints and Negatives: Valdo, Pat Program, Make-ups, and Briggs Cartoon

1932-1935

Box 4: 6

Prints: van Voorden, Loni

undated

Box 4: 7

Prints: Various Circus Acts with Press Releases

1966

Box 4: 8

Realia: fireplace bellows

1966

35 x 15 cm.

Box 12: 15

Small leather and black wood bellows, with inlaid floral design. Note on top in pencil: "Bellows from Mark Twain house in Hartford later in Storrs, left there when the [illeg.] moved."

Slides: Three County Fair

1940

Box 4: 27

Slides: Three County Fair

1949

Box 4: 28

Slides: Three County Fair

1957-1961

Box 4: 29

Slides: Three County Fair

1962

Box 4: 30

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Gift of Chris Emery, July 2017.

### Separated Material

A collection of over 80 books related to the circus were separated from this collection and will be cataloged individually.

### Digitized content

Selected materials have been digitized and are [available for viewing online through our digital repository, Credo](#).

### Separated Material

A book that came with the collection (Nathaniel Dwight, *Short but comprehensive system of the geography of the world*, 4th Northampton ed. Northampton, Mass. : S. and E. Butler, 1807) has been transferred for cataloging to SCUA's general book collection. The volume is inscribed on the ffep "Emily Dickinson's book, Northfield, June 10th," with a line of poetry, however neither the signature nor the poem are from the Amherst poet.

### Processing Information

Processed by Joseph Liporace, 2017.

### Language:

English

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Circus performers

Circus--History

Clowns

Three County Fair (Mass.)

University of Massachusetts Amherst--Alumni

University of Massachusetts Amherst--Staff

## Contributors

Emery, George [main entry]



Special Collections & University Archives

University Libraries : UMass Amherst

154 Hicks Way : Amherst, Mass. 01003-9275

Ph. 413-545-7282 (545-SCUA)

