

Haverstock Toby Tent Shows

By Bobby Jack Muncy

Recently the Kelly Miller Circus visited Krum for its third appearance in three years. The Krum Lions Club sponsored the event. During the 1930-1940 era the Haverstock Family Tent Show visited Krum several times. Bobby Jack Muncy provides us with information about this popular show.

The material below was taken from a doctoral dissertation at Texas Tech University: *The Haverstock Family Tent Show* by Kathleen Judith Sprague, A Dissertation in Fine Arts, Texas Tech University, December 1989. A study of the history of the origins of the tent show founded by Harvey Haverstock. Material from the dissertation has been paraphrased and re-assembled to convey some of the excitement that Krum and other small town residents enjoyed during the latter years of vaudeville. As a young boy in the later 1930s and the early years of the 1940s, it was one of the entertainment events in Krum that I didn't want to miss. *Bobby Jack Muncy*

During the 1930 depression years and the WWII years (1940s), a traveling tent show came to Krum a number of times. A large tent was erected across the street south of the Grain Elevator. This was a vaudeville type show called the Haverstock Toby Show.

In the early years (1915+) the show traveled by rail. Later, trucks (pulling trailers) brought the show to town. The show had a large stage, folding chairs, and a musical band. There were comedy plays, skits, circus type acts (such as jugglers, etc.). It kept your attention.

A Toby and Susie comedy act was one of the highlights. This Haverstock show traveled in Oklahoma, Texas and Illinois. They played to hundreds of small towns from their first season in 1911 until they closed in 1954. A network of small towns made up their circuit. The Haverstocks began touring by railroad car in 1915. The farm-to-market roads were not yet built. By 1911, however, a vast network of railroads crisscrossed Oklahoma and Texas, providing access to many small towns. Slightly improved roads during the 1920s opened up the way to larger rural audiences, but the railroads offered the most efficient and comfortable method of travel. The first of the Haverstocks' route books, showing the railroad route for 1919-20, begins with an entry for Sunday, July 6, 1919 in Garland, Texas and many other places. In July 1931, the following towns were played: Graford, Perrin, Chico, Jackson, Newcastle, Olney, Rhome, Henrietta, Justin, Ringgold, Decatur, Joshua, and Krum---all in Texas.

By the time the Haverstocks opened their 1938 season in Alvord, Texas, they were on a three- or four-night stand routine. The 1938 route in March and April included the following towns in Texas: Alvord, Ponder, Graford, Archer City, Perrin, and Loving.

The year 1941 was a landmark year for the Haverstocks and for many tent show owners. Written across the top of the page on the last page of the 1941 section of the Haverstocks' Banner Ledger are the words, "WAR DECLARED 1941. But just as they survived the death blow that the Depression served to so many tent show owners, the Haverstocks managed to continue on, becoming one of the ever dwindling shows that managed to stay in operation throughout World War II. This was due to the show's being declared essential to the war effort which meant that the Haverstocks were able to obtain enough precious gasoline and rubber for some thirty years. In 1942, the Haverstocks took their show to Joshua, Burleson, Walnut Springs, Crowley, White Settlement, Rhome, Slidell, Justin, Springtown, Newcastle, and Archer City -- all in Texas. By 1946 and continuing to the closing of the show in 1954, according to the route books, the Haverstocks did not go on the road until the spring, continuing to play circle stock throughout the winter months. In 1946, they opened once again in Alvord, Texas, then Irvington, Illinois. The show finally closed on November 24 in Alvord, Texas—the town where Peggy and Rolland first met and where the

show had so often opened its season. Only a small number of towns where this show performed is listed here. It came to Krum, Texas a number of times.

Traveling Tent-shows had vaudeville acts of some type, since most of the performers had worked vaudeville—song and dance teams—talking, singing acts—jugglers- etc. Lotta was perhaps the most gifted performer in the Toby Shows. The Scrapbooks abound with articles from local newspapers along the route, raving about Lotta Haverstock, or "Susie" as she later came to be called because she played that character so often. One such article reads: "while the entire company is good, it is natural that Mrs. Haverstock is decidedly the favorite with our show goers. She is a natural leading lady and much of the life inoculated in the plays by the players is due to her talent. They must do their best if they succeed in winning recognition while she is on stage." People would bring her presents and send her letters. Haver and Lotta may have worked well together, but Haver was also the undisciplined, unpredictable, spontaneous counterpart to his Lotta. He was, in a word, the funny man on the show. His son recalled: "There are Tobys that are funny, who say something and laugh at themselves. He never laughed. He could just look at you on stage and get this look in his eye and you'd break up. He did that time and time again. He was a very funny man." In 1924, the Haverstock Comedians' posters emphasized clean moral plays with a worthwhile message and refined wholesome comedies." By the 1930s, this same wholesomeness was associated with the then popular Toby plays, and the Haverstocks sent out flyers offering "one of America's finest tent theatres, with Toby, the wise- cracking country boy, Lotta as Toby's gal Susie, Rolland the magician with his unusual mysteries between acts, and Peggy and her accordion.""

The Haverstocks first raised their canvas in 1911 and performed continuously until they closed in 1955. Even when most shows were closing during the Depression and later when modern technology threatened their existence and a second world war drained their ranks, the Haverstocks continued to operate, often not even closing during the bitter winter months, as was the practice of most rep shows.

Bobby Jack Muncy

