

# Gazette.

FRIDAY EVENING, AUGUST 22, 1906.

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## Luna Park

TWICE DAILY ON THE BIG HIPPODROME STAGE

### BARLOW'S ELEPHANTS

GREATEST ANIMAL ACT ON EARTH.

THE BIG CARNIVAL EVENT  
**"Skiddoo Day"**  
 THURSDAY, AUGUST 23.

TRIUMPHAL RETURN ENGAGEMENT

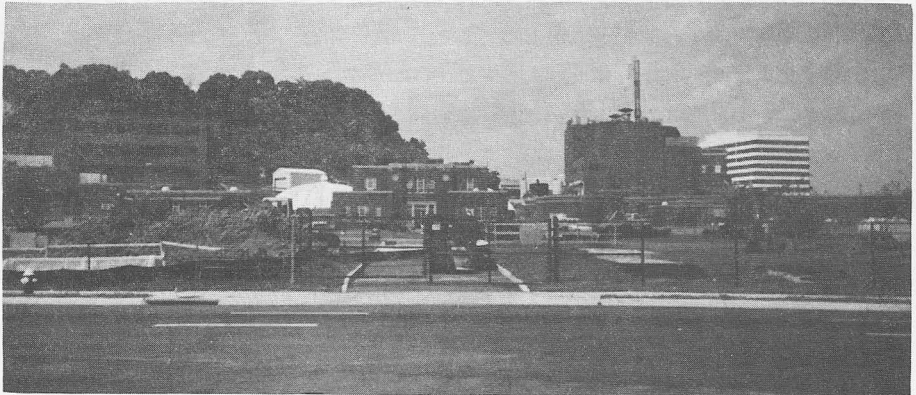
### Don Philippini's Spanish Band

Concerts Every Afternoon and Evening.

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Grand Tournament and Coronation Ball,  
 Monday, August 27.

OVER FORTY ENTRIES. ELABORATE PROGRAMME.



Site of Luna Park today. South Glebe Road and South Eads Street.

## THE GREAT NORTHERN VIRGINIA ELEPHANT HUNT

By

Gail Baker

"A Fairyland of Amusement Overlooking the Beautiful Potomac" is how its promoters described Luna Park, a 40-acre amusement park situated along Four Mile Run in what is now Arlington County, Virginia. (Today, the site is occupied by the Arlington County incinerator facility, at the northwest corner of South Glebe Road and South Eads Street.) Designed and built by Frederick Ingersoll of Pittsburgh at a cost of \$350,000, the park opened on May 28, 1906, offering "30 great attractions," including rides, funhouses, a ballroom, restaurants, picnic grounds, concerts, circus shows and even its own emergency hospital.<sup>1</sup> A contemporary plan of Luna Park, showing these features, is at page 46.

The park also booked special feature acts for a week or two at a time. One of these acts, "Barlow's Elephants," had a longer engagement and a much wider audience than its promoters had expected!

Mr. Barlow and his four trained elephants arrived at Luna Park from Coney Island, New York, on Sunday, August 19, 1906,<sup>2</sup> and were scheduled to present two shows a day during that week. On the morning of Tuesday, August 21, however, the animals got loose while Barlow was sleeping. *The Evening Star* of that date gave the following account:

There was no one on the spot who was used to dealing with elephants. In fact, the only persons around were Mr. Fleetwood,<sup>3</sup> the superintendent of the grounds, and a few laborers. None of these professed any intimate knowledge of elephants, and did not display much ambition about learning. They did concentrate on one of them, however, and "shooed" him back to his quarters, but the remaining three, liking the looks of the country, started off for a stroll .... It turned out that the trio headed toward Arlington Junction, where two of them were corralled by the car men and some venturesome citizens, but the third continued on his way rejoicing, and when last seen he was apparently going up to inspect the Arlington estate [Arlington House].<sup>4</sup>

In the next day's *Alexandria Gazette*, a second account of the escape appeared, along with an advertisement for Luna Park proclaiming Barlow's Elephants as the "Greatest Animal Act on Earth" (reproduced on the opposite page). Perhaps unaware of the irony in the juxtaposition of this showman's

hyperbole and the real-life news story of wild animals on the loose, the *Gazette* reported that these same performing elephants

bolted from their enclosure, completely wrecking it, and, after damaging the ice-cream parlor and dining hall, dashed their way through the southern gate toward the swamps of Four-Mile run. One of them, "Annie," was recaptured an hour later and is tied safely to the base of the shutes [sic]. "Tom," the comedian elephant, and the other two females, "Jennie" and "Queenie," took to the woods. They were surrounded twice but escaped each time, and at 8 o'clock last night [Tuesday] had been got together near a farmhouse in Virginia, 20 miles from Washington, but had not been captured.

The newspaper also noted that a severe thunderstorm was under way and that Barlow was offering a \$500 reward for the capture of each elephant.<sup>5</sup>

The hunt continued on Wednesday. Tom had been captured late Tuesday evening (presumably too late to be included in the Wednesday *Gazette's* coverage), taken to the Hampton Stock Farm and chained to a tree, while Barlow "returned to Alexandria for chains and saddle parties." Before he could return, however, Tom broke loose:

Two hundred acres of Hampton Farm are thickly wooded, and it was there that "Tom," "Queenie" and "Jennie" were on a rampage. Scouting parties were sent through the woods in different directions, and caught sight of all three elephants several times during the morning. The beasts disappeared every time anyone approached within hearing distance in the thickets.

The trail was repeatedly found and lost and it was not until 3 o'clock yesterday [Wednesday] afternoon that Tom was located by accident [and recaptured].<sup>6</sup>

That left Jennie and Queenie on the loose. On Friday, August 24, the *Gazette* reported the next installment of the chase, which had occurred on Thursday:

One of the female elephants was sighted at Young's farm, near Arlington Postoffice, four miles from Mr. Courtland Smith's farm. Barlow led the posse across the country, and after some searching, both of the missing females were sighted.

According to this account, Jennie was captured, but Queenie,

the wildest of the herd, would not allow anyone to approach her. Barlow asked that a telegram be sent to Pawnee Bill's headquarters at Coney Island asking them to arrange with Major [George

W.] Lillie (Pawnee Bill), who will be in Washington with a show on Saturday, to be ready to send experienced cowboys and trained horses into Virginia to help capture Queenie.<sup>7</sup>

In its August 27 issue, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported that on Sunday morning (August 26), Pawnee Bill and four of his cowboys captured — or recaptured — Jennie “on R. Rowe’s farm, in Alexandria county .... [They] took her across the country to Luna Park, where she was stabled in the Four-Mile Run power house with Tom and Fannie.” “Fannie” was apparently the “Annie” of earlier accounts. Queenie was spotted late in the day “in the vicinity of Burke’s station, on the Southern Railway main line, eight miles from Alexandria.”<sup>8</sup>

The *Fairfax Herald* of August 31 picks up the story from there:

Monday morning [August 27] news was received here that one of the elephants that had escaped from Luna Park [Queenie] ... had crossed the road between this place and Fairfax Station ... leaving tracks in the mud of immense proportions. Four young men mounted their steeds to go in pursuit [sic] of the beast..... They soon got on his trail and “came up with him” near Clifton, where he was quietly enjoying his liberty. They got quite close to him, but whenever the elephant would start toward them with a snort of disapproval they would unanimously and wisely conclude that they didn’t want to catch him anyhow, and move back so as to give him more room to enjoy himself. Then they “surrounded” him, but still the elephant’s liberty was in no wise abridged. They did as much, however, as anybody else, similarly situated, could have done, and kept him corraled until the arrival of his trainer, who took him in charge.<sup>9</sup>

A week later, on September 7, the *Fairfax Herald* congratulated the “elephant hunters” and added new information to the previous week’s report:

[T]he big brute [Queenie] was discovered in the woods near Brinckman’s saw-mill and surrounded by a considerable number of men at whom he became enraged, and with loud trumpeting charged with elevated trunk. One of the party sought safety, as he thought, by climbing a small tree — which the elephant shook (as a boy would for persimmons), when the man dropped from the branches and ran, it is said, as he never did before — when luckily a dog happened to divert the elephant’s attention which in all probability saved the hunter’s life. He was finally captured near Clifton.<sup>10</sup>

The *Alexandria Gazette* gave these details of Queenie's capture:

Queenie ... was captured near Clifton station ... Tuesday night [August 28]. The animal was in a dense pine forest. The capture of the elephant was effected by P. W. Barlow, the trainer, and Dick Richards, Queenie's keeper, assisted by Joe Rose, a young Italian, who was employed as a laborer at the park, and Jim Young, colored, who had been engaged as a guide when the elephants made their break for liberty. The elephant was placed in a freight car, brought to the city and later led to the park.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to compare these contemporary newspaper reports with accounts written much later. The best known account written after the event is probably Eleanor Lee Templeman's "Luna Park and the Elephant Hunt," published in her 1959 book, *Arlington Heritage*.<sup>12</sup> The statement of facts is almost identical in an earlier account given by Dorothy Ellis Lee in her book, *A History of Arlington County, Virginia*, published in 1946. Lee noted that the story was told to her by "former sheriff, Howard B. Fields, who was an employee at Lunar [sic] Park at this time."<sup>13</sup> (Fields, a man noted for his spellbinding stories, was also the great-great uncle of the author of this article, who first heard the elephant hunt story from him as a child.)

Perhaps the greatest discrepancy between contemporary and later accounts concerns the number of roaming elephants. Lee reported that one elephant was captured almost immediately at the park, and that the other three "roamed around" near Franconia "for several days" before they "were finally caught and loaded on a train at the Burke Station."<sup>14</sup> According to Templeman's account, all four left the park. One was captured the next day, but "[T]he other three elephants remained at large for several weeks .... They were eventually caught in Fairfax County, and loaded on a freight train at Burke Station."<sup>15</sup>

There have also been several "eyewitness" accounts of the elephant hunt, told — or retold — from a purely personal perspective. For example, in 1988 Irene Rouse wrote of hearing the story from her father, William Reed Munson:

The tale goes that Daddy had done something wrong and was being punished; he was 11, or so, and he escaped from the house to hide under the back porch, where he promptly fell asleep. ....

He spent the night under the house. In the morning, he was terrified to hear a great pounding of hoofs and the bellowing of tropical animals. No doubt his conscience was bothering him and he thought the devil, himself, had taken out after him.

He peeped from behind a brick column and saw four elephants, in the yard, rooting and stomping and bellowing ....<sup>16</sup>

"Four," "three," "two" or "one" — who could blame an 11-year-old if he didn't count the number of elephants in the yard exactly right, or if he embellished the story a little in the telling. As the reporters from the *Alexandria Gazette*, the *Washington Evening Star*, and the *Fairfax Herald*, Howard B. Fields, Dorothy Ellis Lee, Eleanor Lee Templeman, William Reed Munson and Irene Rouse all knew, the great elephant hunt made for a wonderful tale and a vivid footnote in the history of Northern Virginia.

### Notes and References

Gail Baker, a native Arlingtonian, is a member of the Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board. She has previously written two articles for the *Arlington Historical Magazine*: "Maywood: Development of a Suburb, Birth of a Neighborhood," in 1987 (Vol. 8, No. 3), with Barbara Warnick Silberman; and "Carlin Hall," in 1993 (Vol. 10, No. 1).

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<sup>1</sup>"Washington Luna Park" (promotional brochure). (Washington: Washington Luna Park Co., 1903.)

<sup>2</sup>"Elephant Hunt in the County," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 22, 1906, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>The superintendent of the grounds (Mr. Fleetwood) is called Mr. Sweetwood is some accounts.

<sup>4</sup>"Elephants Astray," (Washington) *Evening Star*, August 21, 1906, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>"Elephant Hunt in the County," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 22, 1906, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>"The Stray Elephants," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 23, 1906, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>"The Stray Elephants," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 24, 1906, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>"Another Elephant Caught," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 27, 1906, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>"Went After the Elephant," *Fairfax Herald*, August 31, 1906, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>"Fairfax Station," *Fairfax Herald*, September 7, 1906, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>"Elephant Captured," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 30, 1906.

<sup>12</sup>Eleanor Lee Templeman, *Arlington Heritage: Vignettes of a Virginia County* (Arlington, Va.: The Author, 1959).

<sup>13</sup>Dorothy Ellis Lee, *A History of Arlington County, Virginia* (Richmond, Va.: Dietz Press, 1946), p. 47.

<sup>14</sup>Lee, pp. 45-47.

<sup>15</sup>Templeman, *Arlington Heritage*, p. 164.

<sup>16</sup>Irene Rouse, "Amusement Parks and Pachyderms," *Chincoteague (Virginia) Chronicle*, April 21, 1988.