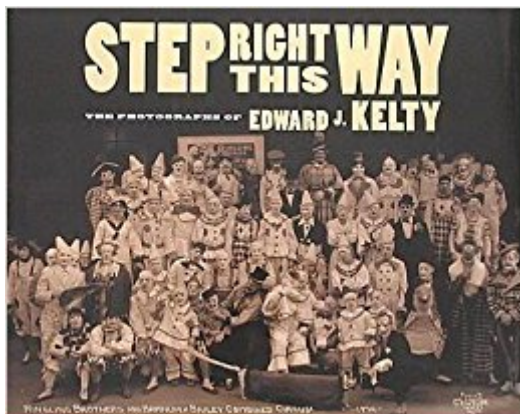


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# Step Right This Way: The Photographs Of Edward J. Kelty



## Synopsis

Book by Kelty, Edward J., Barth, Miles, Siegel, Alan M., Hoagland, Edward

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The successor to Barth and Alan Siegel's eye-popping *One Man's Eye* (2000) is also concerned with a particular person's vision, this time not photo collector Siegel's but that of a professional banquet photographer with a sideline in circus publicity. Edward J. Kelty's circus pictures, taken from the mid-1920s to the 1940s, consist of group portraits of clowns, sideshow attractions, bands, elephants, menageries, aerialists, equestrians, tractor and train crews, candy butchers (seen with their backs turned to show the "Baby Ruth Candy" logo on their smocks), and even everybody in the Ringling-Barnum cookhouse tent on July 4, 1935. He also lensed stars such as lion-tamer Clyde Beatty, teenage tightrope walker Harold Barnes, and Hugo Zacchini, *Human Projectile* (posed atop his cannon), and interior and exterior panoramas of circuses pitched in Tarrytown, Terre Haute, and other fair burghs. Kelty used a specially made "banquet" camera that produced 12-by-20-inch images. Reproduced here at about two-fifths that size and as originally tinted (sepia or cyan) when appropriate, they are scrumptious, sometimes outrageous (see "Cheerful Gardner," who worked with elephants--sheesh!) eye-candy. Ray Olson

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I've had an Edward Kelty photograph (of the Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey clowns) hanging in my

hall for decades. I always thought it was curious, but knew nothing about it until I started researching Edward Kelty/Century Photos. What an amazing story! Kelty's life leaves almost as many questions unanswered as answered, but *Step Right This Way* does a fine job of defining the man behind the photographs. Like Kelty's photos, the book says just enough, so that the "curious" quality of the artist and his work can speak for itself. *Step Right This Way* is a trip to the circus in the age before electronic media supplanted live shows, and the beautiful, large photos reproduced in the book let us wade right into that age. We learn as much about ourselves, the audience, as we do about the photo subjects. Were we - are we still - held spellbound by the mixture of beauty and deformity that the circus offered? The book, like the circus, is a place where we are entertained, shocked, fascinated, and can't tear our eyes away.

Although it is fascinating seeing the photographs of Edward Kelty, the author of the book has done nothing to contribute to the knowledge to be gained here. Surprisingly, the captions list nothing except the words that are printed on the photographs themselves. Here you have some of the most amazing "Special People" of all times, and none of them are identified unless it was written on the photo. It is not a mystery who most of these people were if the author had bothered to ask any of the wonderful resources he cites. I have only read one other book (out of print)- "Very Special People" and many of them are identifiable from that book alone. Edward Hoagland's intro is also a disappointment. Although he says he spent some time working in the world portrayed, I find it hard to believe that all the people therein were either pedophiles, itinerants and other seedy stereotypes to which he alludes. Many were lovely, talented people who overcame incredible hardship and handicaps and had optimistic and positive outlooks beyond belief. What this book needs are carefully researched captions and an index - perhaps someone truly familiar with the subject will write one. As interesting as the photos are, the book shows a lack of respect for the photographer and the people he photographed.

I bought this book for myself. My relatives owned a circus during the late 1890's and early 1900's and I thought it would be an interesting book to add to my collection of circus books. I found out about it from a trailer on the movie "Water for Elephants". I have enjoyed reading it and looking at the various pictures. Thank you for being a stepping stone to finding books like this.

Great resource for the visual drama of the circus and the sideshow in days gone by.

Though this is a large book, you will probably finish reading it in one evening. The only text is a breezy 34 page introduction, with accompanying pictures. The rest of the book is mostly full-page pictures with very minimal captions. At least half the time, the captions are no more than what is already written on the original picture - it makes me think that the authors (presumably Barth & Siegel, though there is no text by them, the introduction was written by Edward Hoagland) were told that a published book has to caption the pictures, so they did the minimum amount of work necessary. For the pictures without information written on them, the captions consist of a year and a location, circus or performance house...very minimal! Though the introduction is a very nice read, it has no depth and skips all over the place, to wherever Mr. Hoagland thought to go next. It talks a little about some of the pictures, a little about Mr. Kelty, the circuses, the times and the challenges faced. This leaves the reader to look at the pictures and take them for face value, just like the people who came to the circus in the 30's. We have no background information, no introduction, and no inside information - all we can do is "stare at the freaks". I believe that is really the point of the book. Though I have no first-person reference, as the advertisement in the Introduction says: "We have the fattest women in the world, and the tallest man, and a girl who has no arms or legs, and midgets who are married! Have you ever seen a camel spit, or seals play catch, or elephants stand on their heads? A man with reptile scales who was once just like you! And the Good Lord made him. Can you finish your ice cream after you have looked at him?"...Good question! Looking at these pictures, I get an appreciation for the time and people. Cameras are new, and each picture is clearly an "Event". There are people who are very disturbing, some who are merely trying to disturb you, and others who just don't give a damn. Some of the people are no more weird than what you would find in any large city, others seem clearly different. Through the pictures, I get an appreciation for the packaging of weirdness. Though you could peruse the pictures quickly, and laugh like the people who originally went to the circus; I was left with questions about what these pictures say about these people, and about the people who watched them. What do these pictures say about America, back then and today? This book has provided food for thought for me. I am divided on whether I wanted more of the back-story, or if the pictures tell their own story. No book can be everything so, since I am still thinking about these pictures, for me the book was a success. For people who want to know more, this book would make a good accompaniment to a more scholarly work.

For the Circus lovers, this will make such a great gift! The book is out-of-print and whoever will open these covers will enter a strange, pleasant, gone world. See some other rare circus products! Vintage Ringling Bros Barnum & Bailey Circus Decal Set 1950 Vintage Ringling Bros

Barnum & Bailey Circus Decal 1950 Vintage Ringling Bros Barnum & Bailey Circus Decal Set 1950

As the son of a former circus (Ringling Brothers, Al G. Barnes, et al) employee who has a Kelty photograph of his father in a circus from 1936, who himself took photos during his time in the circus, I found the Kelty photographs captured much of the same ambience as in my father's pictures. In other words, authenticity and poignancy.

If you wish you could go back in time to golden age of the circus (as I do), this book will at least make you feel a little closer. Kelty's photos are awesome considering the technology of the day and the prints look amazing!

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