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# Arts & Living

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The Beacon Journal  
 Monday  
 December 24, 2007



REVIEW

## The Black Keys energize hometown crowd

Firestone High School graduates attack blues-rock set list at Akron Civic Theatre

The Black Keys have spent five years cranking out hip-swiveling blues rock and playing any dive in America, Europe and Australia that would have them.

Saturday night the Firestone High School graduates (guitarist/singer Dan Auerbach and drummer Patrick Carney) made their triumphant debut on the

stage of the Akron Civic Theatre, showing what hard work, focus and a few good riffs can bring.

"I feel like there should be *Rocky & Bullwinkle*" cartoon playing behind us, Auerbach said, referring to his childhood memories of watching cartoons at the theater on weekends.

The duo, playing to a sold-out

and amped-up crowd, attacked its set list like a hungry lion on a baby gazelle, channeling any nervous energy into its songs.

Several years of hardcore touring have taught the Keys how to pace a show and how to wring the maximum tension and release out of every song.

Songs such as the opening *Girl*

*Is On My Mind* were embellished with extended solos, breakdowns that built to dramatic cheer - inducing crescendos and other variations that added to the original versions. The band also played four new songs from its upcoming album due in early 2008. The album recorded with hot knob twiddler Danger Mouse (half of Gnarl Barkley and Dangerdome) is the band's first with an outside

producer. Judging from the new tunes, the album should be a little less riff-reliant and expand the band's blues, fuzzy blues-rock sound. Both *Strange Time*, which had a near-punk tempo and rhythm, and *Remember When* featured melodic lines that were less bluesy than usual but no less effective. But *I Got Mine*, one of



MALCOLM X  
ABRAM

Please see **Keys, D2**

This place, This time Local history



Goodyear Heights resident Robert W. Harned makes a slight adjustment to one of the colorful attractions in his miniature circus in 1945. He worked for 35 years on *The Greatest Little Show on Earth*, a traveling display that appeared at Akron department stores.

Akron craftsman put painstaking detail into his miniature four-tent display

## Circus fan whittled own show

By Mark J. Price  
 Beacon Journal staff writer

Akron rubber worker Robert W. Harned had the most amazing basement in town.

A colorful parade of clowns, elephants, acrobats, gorillas, musicians, giraffes and ballet dancers marched every night in his Goodyear Heights home.

More than 300 costumed characters and 400 whimsical beasts roamed the premises.

Harned, a self-taught craftsman, built a miniature circus that delighted ladies and gentlemen and children of all ages. He called it "The Greatest Little Show on Earth," a traveling display at downtown Akron stores in the 1940s and 1950s.

He spent six to eight hours a day on the project for the better part of three decades. Working on a scale of a half-inch to the foot, Harned carved little dolls and animals from orange crates. No two pieces were identical.

Each figure took about 12 hours to whittle, two hours to assemble and four hours to paint. Harned also made tiny costumes, which could add six more hours. The man certainly had patience.

Born in Hygeia Springs, Tenn., in 1894, Harned discovered the circus at a young age. His father operated a carousel in Nashville. Many of the carvings Harned later made were based on circus acts he had seen.



Carved from orange crates, each figure took about 12 hours to whittle, two hours to assemble and four hours to paint.

His life was full of characters. Harned joined the Marines in World War I and bunked with boxer Gene Tunney at Parris Island, S.C. He served in the office of Josephus Daniels, U.S. secretary of the Navy, and took dictation from Franklin D. Roosevelt, the assistant secretary.

When the war ended, Harned moved to Akron for a job at Goodyear

Please see **Circus, D2**

## Domestic violence group needs help

**Domestic Violence Project Inc.**, P.O. Box 9432, Canton, OH 44711, provides emergency and supportive services, including drug and alcohol treatment, to victims of domestic violence. It also promotes public awareness of domestic violence issues. The organization needs cash donations, gift cards to area grocery stores, gas cards and other items (call for a complete list). Contact Carolyn Tillet, 330-

**People helping People**

453-7233, Ext. 226, or [carolynt@dvpi.org](mailto:carolynt@dvpi.org). The Web site is <http://www.dvpi.org>.

**Heaven Can Wait** rescues animals solely from the Summit County Animal Control Facility. The organization needs monetary donations and items including collars, leashes, dog beds, crates, cages, dry kitten and puppy food, dog and cat sweaters, cat litter, dog and cat toys, bowls, paper towels, laundry detergent, trash bags, antibacterial hand soap, antibacterial dish detergent, Purell and

Please see **Charity, D3**

## THE SCENE



DAN BRUBAKER/Special to the Akron Beacon Journal

### Sharing holiday spirits

Vicke Robison of Canton (middle) serves cake to Gwendolyn Cherry of Alliance (left) and Georgia King of Canton at the Canton Negro Old Timers holiday dinner for senior citizens on Saturday.

### This Week

**The Women's Board of Akron Children's Hospital** will host its 105th Annual Charity Ball from 6 p.m. to midnight Thursday at Goodyear Hall, 1144 E. Market St. in Akron. The black-tie event will honor 45 area young women for their accomplishments and the volunteer contributions of their families to the greater Akron area. \$125. To receive an invitation, call the hospital volunteer office at 330-543-8424.

### Plan Ahead

**Main Street Orville**, the nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and revitalization of Orville's historic downtown, will host "New Years on Main" from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. Dec. 31 at the Maibach Ford Community Room, 1780 N. Main St. in Orville. Celebrate the New Year with music and dancing to the Phil and Sparky Show Band while enjoying

appetizers and desserts from area restaurants and caterers. \$50, includes food, soft drinks and mixers all night plus two drink tickets. Cash bar. 330-682-0317 or <http://www.mainstreetorville.org>.

**New Year's Eve Dance to the Stars** with professional dance instructor Joseph Rittenhouse from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. Dec. 31 at Greenbriar Party Center, 50 Riffel Road in Wooster. One-hour dance class, hors d'oeuvres, cash bar, dancing and traditional buffet at 11 p.m. \$40 individual/\$75 couple, advance sale only. All proceeds benefit the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Wayne County. For reservations, call 330-345-8333.

**Canton Ex-Newsboys Charities** will benefit from a concert featuring LaFlavour and Jimmy & the Soul Blazers on Jan. 4 at the Canton Civic Center, 1101 Market Ave. N., Canton. Doors open at 6 p.m.; music 7 p.m. to midnight. \$15. Tickets available at Papa Bear's

Please see **Scene, D3**

# Keys

## Speaker problems don't ruin show

Continued from Page D1

three songs also recorded by the late Ike Turner for an abandoned project, had the familiar Auerbach "Big Riff," steady, stomping backbeat and soulful vocals.

Although the band brought plenty of energy, it apparently didn't bring enough for the Civic Theatre's PA system. Throughout the evening, depending on which speaker was closest, the pounding of the kick drum frequently popped and during a sing-a-long of *No Trust*, the speakers buzzed and crackled under the strain, causing audience members near the speaker box to grimace.

Nevertheless, the crowd filled with friends and fans from surrounding states, including West Virginia and Michigan, happily ate up everything the Keys were serving. They cheered at all the breakdowns, pumped their fists and sang along to the bands set staples, including *Set You Free*

*Busted* and *10 A.M. Automatic* and a set-closing version of Devo's *Uncontrollable Urge* that devolved the song from its original taut, jittery punk flavoring into a heavy, crawling, blues-rock tune.

Earlier in the evening, opening bands Jessica Lea Mayfield a.k.a. "Chittlin'" and Beaten Awake did nice jobs warming up the crowd. First was singer/songwriter Mayfield, whose upcoming debut was recorded and produced by Auerbach. Her songs are built on a base of a few strummed chords on her acoustic guitar and her relaxed singing style. They were wonderfully embellished by her pick-up band, which included Auerbach on guitar/organ and harmony vocals and area vet (and former Auerbach guitar teacher) Mike Lenz, who added layers of tremulous textures and simple melodic solos.

Beaten Awake, signed to Carney's Audio Eagle Records, played a set mixed with tunes from their debut *Let's Get Simplified* and new songs. Both singer/songwriters were effective, but it was John Finley's rough-hewn and immediate vocals that drew spontaneous cheers.

Malcolm X Abram can be reached at [mabram@thebeaconjournal.com](mailto:mabram@thebeaconjournal.com) or 330-996-3758.



Patrick Carney (left) and Daniel Auerbach of The Black Keys played in their hometown Saturday at the Akron Civic Theatre.

ED SUBA JR./Akron Beacon Journal

# Circus

## Craftsman would retire acts, add new ones

Continued from Page D1

Tire & Rubber Co.

A short, rotund fellow, he liked to tell the story of how he met his wife, Ruth, in 1921 while wading at an Akron beach.

"My wife wanted to marry a big, bronzed, broad-shouldered fellow," he said. "I met her while we were in swimming, and I was standing on a large rock. She was very disappointed when she saw me in street clothes. But I must have been long on talk. We were married 15 months later."

### Creation of collection

The couple settled into a house at 376 Malacca St. The neighbors didn't know the circus was coming! Harned began carving figures around 1925 and spent the next 35 years on the project.

He built 45 circus wagons, four tents, two trains and one parade. He created clowns, ringmasters, trapeze artists, animal trainers, bandleaders and circus beauties. He sculpted elephants, polar bears, camels, horses, tigers, leopards, zebras and seals.

Harned's pride was a sideshow of 60 oddball characters. Acts included fire eater Professor Flamo, sword queen Etta Knife, thin man Percy Tape, fat lady Tuba Larda, human pin-cushion Professor Stickem, bearded lady Madame Razor and circus dwarf Major One Low.

His four-tent display, which had a seating capacity of 20,000, was insured for \$100,000.

"This circus is not on exhibition solely for the purpose of bringing entertainment and enjoyment to the young and old alike," Harned explained in 1947. "The purpose we have in mind - above and beyond the entertainment value - is to bring the educational aspect of the circus closer to children."

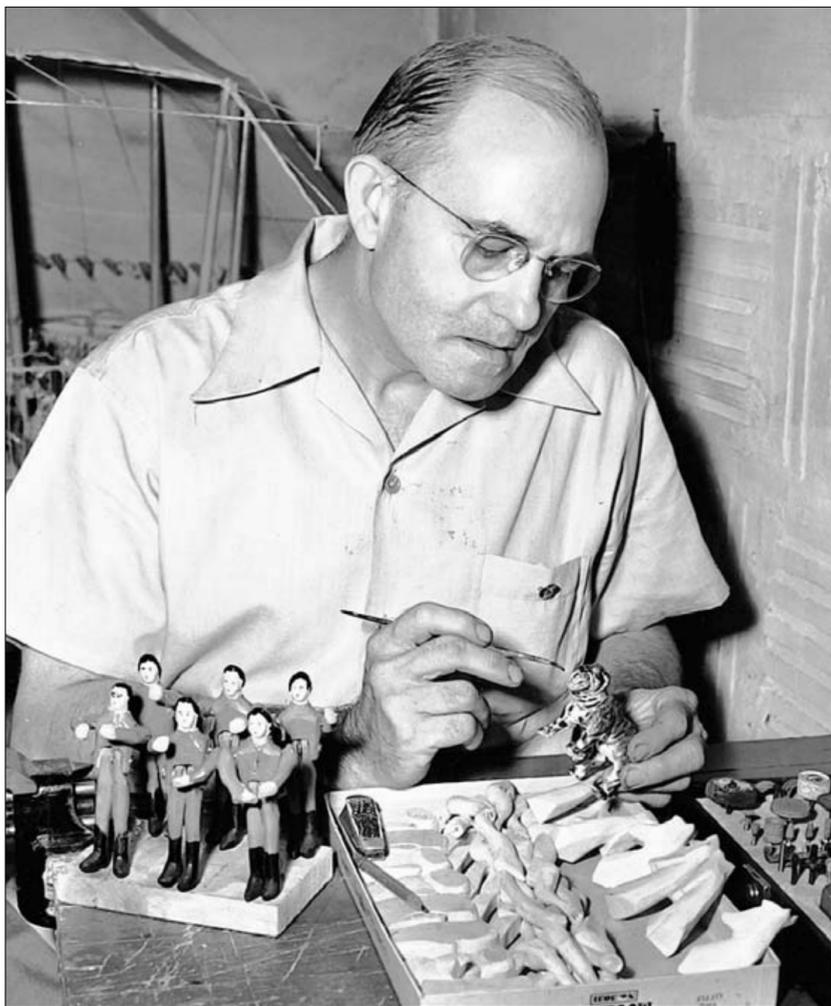
### Children visit

Fairlawn resident Gary Curtis, 68, who grew up next door to Harned, said it was like having Santa Claus for a neighbor. The man was always in his workshop making toys.

"Back in those days, people didn't even lock their doors half of the time," Curtis said. "My sister and I would go over there and we'd go downstairs and he had his little whittling room in the basement. Then he had a room with a table with all his display on it. He would sit there at his whittling bench and whittle away."

Boy Scout troops and other children's groups toured the Harned home to watch the craftsman work.

"Bobby and Ruthie," as the neighbor kids called them, were



Akron Beacon Journal file photo

Craftsman Robert W. Harned paints a circus tiger in 1943 in the basement workshop of his home at 376 Malacca St. in Akron.

very friendly, Curtis said. Harned was on the quiet side, but he was a real showman. He danced and juggled when he put his circus on display.

### A famous clown

Curtis remembers the time that famed clown Emmett Kelly visited the Harned home.

"We were all excited," he said. "We would periodically check out the front window to see if anybody was coming. One of us saw a car drive up, and this man get out in a suit and tie."

No makeup. No hobo outfit. "Of course, it didn't look like Emmett Kelly," Curtis said.

Despite all the work, Harned never felt that his circus was complete. He debuted new acts and retired old ones - just like a full-size circus would do.

Eventually, though, the ringmaster folded his tent.

The Harneds were an older couple who didn't have children. They moved to Canton in the 1960s to be closer to Ruth Harned's sister and her family.

### Collection passed on

Before he left Akron, Harned parted with his beloved collection. He sold the circus to train enthusiast Mack Lowry,

whose Railways of America museum was a popular spot off State Route 8. "The Greatest Little Show on Earth" joined Lowry's giant display of model trains.

Robert W. Harned died in 1969 at age 75. His wife, Ruth, passed away in 1980 at 86.

What became of the circus? It's been in plain sight for years.

Lowry's collection moved to Akron's Quaker Square in 1976 and became a big attraction at the REA Express restaurant, later called The Depot. Harned's circus went along for the ride.

When the train display was dismantled, circus parts moved into dioramas throughout the building. Other pieces were kept in storage for years.

### Future display?

This year's sale of Quaker Square to the University of Akron has caused a small commotion under the big top.

Becky Pete, retail manager of shops at Quaker Square for UA, unlocked a second-floor storefront to reveal what she has been sorting since July.

"It's all here," she said. "It just needs assembled."

Circus wagons fill the shelves. Clowns mingle with

acrobats and dancers. Tuba Larda and Madame Razor smile knowingly.

Hundreds of circus parts are arranged in rows. Most of the collection appears to be intact.

"Somebody is going to put all this together," said Pete, who has worked at Quaker Square for 27 years. "It's going to be quite an undertaking."

Russ Siebert, UA vice president of board operations, said there is a proposal to open a museum on the lower level at Quaker Square - beneath the stores.

"We're working very hard to keep the culture of the place," he said.

The model trains and miniature circus could be a part of it. Officials will consider restoring the displays once the university gets accustomed to the building.

"The expression I'm using is 'Try it on for a while and see how the place fits,'" Siebert said.

Robert W. Harned's circus, "The Greatest Little Show on Earth," is waiting for an encore.

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# Long-closed Yeager's in Akron brings back youthful memories

By Mark J. Price  
Beacon Journal staff writer

Green resident Ruth Knight saw a familiar face in the 1931 photo. The more she looked, the more she became convinced.

The picture, which appeared Dec. 10 in the Beacon Journal's "This Place, This Time," featured a sales clerk at the C.H. Yeager Co. in downtown Akron.

Knight needed confirmation. She mailed a copy of the picture to her sister Sandra Joyce in Escondido, Calif. A few days later, the phone rang in Green.

"Ruthie, that's Mother," Joyce said.

"That's her," Knight agreed.

The sisters recalled that Grace Holderbaum Nelson worked at Yeager's during the Depression when their father, Henry, lost his B.F. Goodrich job. "She didn't work there too long because she already had three children at home," Knight said.

The family needed income, so Henry Nelson looked after the children while his wife went to work. "I remember my dad being home," Knight said.

More than 75 years later, a photo of a busy clerk turned out to be a nice holiday surprise.

"Thank you," Knight said.

**FAMILY HISTORY.** Peg Yeager Robinson's phone rang off the hook.

"How wonderful that article was that you wrote about the Yeager Co.," she said.

Her father was John L. Yeager, her grandfather was Joseph Yeager and her great-uncle was Charlie Yeager. The store employed just about everyone in the Akron woman's family.

"I worked in the advertising department and wrote radio commercials and copy for ads that appeared in the Beacon," she said.

Her father and his brother, R.G. Yeager, used to tell stories about growing up on a farm near Newton Falls and operating a general store.

"They bartered," she said. "People would bring in the products that they made. I remember them telling the story about the woman who was always bringing in butter in exchange for some other kind of merchandise that she needed."

One day, the butter seemed heavier than usual. The woman had put a stone in the butter and fled with her goods.

"I'm just about the last one that really remembers the stories that my father and uncle told," Robinson said.

### CHRISTMAS PAST.

Barberton resident Bernie Gnap remembers shopping at Yeager's with his mother, Annie, when he was a little boy in the 1950s.

"Things were a lot cheaper there," he said.

He'll never forget the time in 1956 or 1957 when he and his older sister, Joanne, took a bus to buy Christmas gifts for their mother. They felt so proud to shop at Yeager's on their own.

The children picked out two wall plaques - round, glazed, about 6 inches across - that depicted birds on fruit trees.

"My mom absolutely was thrilled to receive them," Gnap said. "She had them on the living room wall for decades."

Annie Gnap passed away in 1992. Her daughter, Joanne Crookston, followed in 2003.

"Mom's gone, my sister's gone, the plaques are gone and Yeager's is gone, too," he said.

### GOLD TREASURE.

Ravenna resident Dorothy Jones' childhood revolved around the Yeager Co. Her father, Frank White, was a furniture salesman there for about 30 years.

She wandered the store in the 1940s. The employees were like a family, she said.

Carpet department worker Allen Bowers treated her to chocolate sodas at the grill. Window decorator Howard Kaufman made a vase for her.

Store President R.G. Yeager, who was always kind to Jones' father, invited the little girl into his office to chat. "I still have a gold locket that he gave me for Christmas," she said.

### TAGGED.

The Yeager name sounded familiar to Doylestown's Tony De Angelis, but he couldn't quite place it.

"I told my wife (Vicky) about it, and we remembered that about five weeks ago, she had purchased some antique furniture at a tag sale," he said.

They looked under one of the chairs and found an old tag: "The C.H. Yeager Co."

"We had no clue about this company until your article," De Angelis said.

### NO COMPARISON.

Akron's Pat Marks laughed with a friend about the Yeager's article.

"We both worked at O'Neil's, and we'd go down to Yeager's and shop because we couldn't afford O'Neil's prices," she said. "We only got a 10 percent discount, which wasn't much, but even with that, we did better at Yeager's."



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