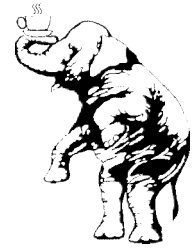


The Story of Modoc Most Famous Elephant in America



On November 11, 1942, the Great American Circus prepared itself to stage an Armistice Day fundraiser for the sixth year at Wabash High School, but no one present could possibly predict the whacky and legendary events about to unfold that afternoon and the days ahead. Lyman Keyes, circus owner, proclaimed this would be his last event in Wabash until the end of WWII because so many of the circus hands were heading off for war. Great American's special animal act featured three gray Indian elephants, Judy, Empress, and Modoc, who stood tethered outside the school gym waiting their chance to perform, when dogs suddenly barked at the elephants' feet, terrorizing them to bolt loose. While Empress and Judy simply meandered to nearby neighborhoods, the twelve year old, 1900 pound Modoc barnstormed!

Modoc charged to downtown Wabash where her long snout picked up the scent of peanuts roasting in Bradley Brothers drugstore (the same spot as Modoc's Market is today). She chased Chauncey Kessler, who wore a long muskrat coat, through the 42-inch door on Miami Street and using her long trunk rolled Mrs. Kessler onto the floor, all the while flabbergasting pharmacy clerk Helen Myers into sheer fright behind the soda fountain. Modoc knocked over the peanut roadster and scarfed up her fill of the little shelled delicacies and thin bidding adieu, she smashed through the back door, frame and all, of the New Bradley Building onto Market Street. She crossed to the Union Cigar Store (Market Street Grill) to poke in, but apparently not whiffing her brand, she moved on.

Modoc was on the rampage for the next five days. Headlines spanned the Wabash Plain Dealer and large and small city newspapers around the country while Modoc criss-crossed the Wabash river five times, running wild from farm to farm to eventually wind up in Huntington County. Worried circus workers, angry farmers, Wabash and Huntington sheriffs, state police, and even Governor Henry F. Shricker joined in chase to see what could be done to capture the storming pachyderm. After a mix of bungled strategies, a black, six foot seven inch, Carolina circus trainer, "Corona" Ezra Smith finally lured Modoc onto her trailer chanting his elephant "mumbo jumbo" and dispensing twenty-six loaves of bread like doggie treats. Relieved owner, Terrel Jacobs, treated Modoc's frazzled nerves and recently captured "nose" cold with a medicinal six quarts of whiskey. Modoc chased down the remedy with thirty gallons of water and ate all night long to regain a smidgen of her mislaid 800 pounds. Keyes later said, "Modoc is contented and glad to be back with the other girls. It is nice to see her become a nice fat girl again."

The Great American Circus never returned to Wabash again, but the memory of its specially featured elephant lives on at Modoc's Market. Thus is the true Wabash history how Modoc became the most famous elephant in America...for one week in 1942!